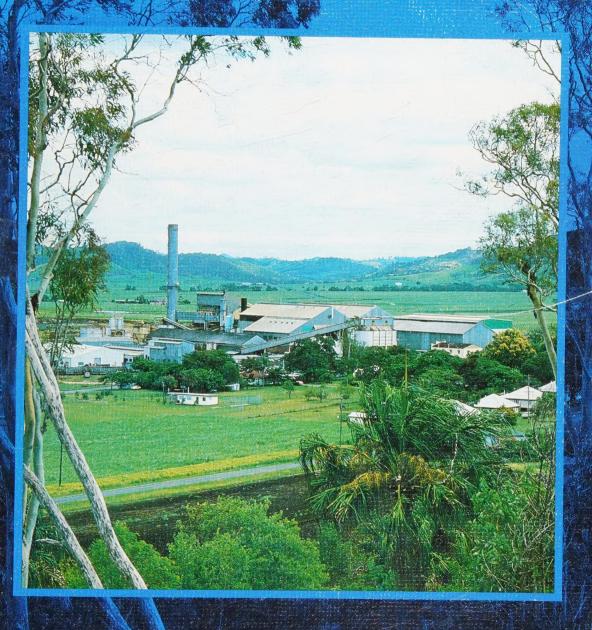
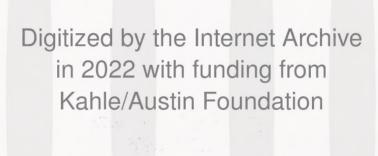
# In their own hands

K.W. Manning



Written for The Farleigh Co-operative Sugar Milling Association Ltd.



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# In their own hands

A North Queensland Sugar Story

Written for the Farleigh Co-operative Sugar Milling Association Ltd.

By K.W Manning



Farleigh Mill cane suppliers were in dispute with the Farleigh Estate Sugar Company Ltd., on the question of a just price for cane. The Company's manager, Mr. James McGown, suggested to them that the best way to solve the price problem was for the cane growers to "get the mill into their own hands".

Reported Mackay *Daily Mercury*, 16th May 1910.

Adams Care

First published in 1983 by Farleigh Co-op Sugar Milling Association Ltd., Farleigh, Queensland, 4741.

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# **FOREWORD**

The Farleigh sugar lands in 1983 include most of the area of 16, nineteenth century sugar plantations and major sections of two separate rural communities extending northwards from the "North Side" of the Pioneer River at Mackay.

John Spiller is credited with having planted Mackay district's first cane on one of those plantations — Pioneer — in June 1865. In 1873 Francis Tyssen Amhurst, who had in November 1870 opened Foulden plantation next to Spiller, bought from Mrs. Eliza Hilfling, country on which he planned to erect a new mill. This land became Farleigh plantation. The mill was not built until 1883, by which time Frank Amhurst had died and his Mackay estates had passed to his uncle, wealthy agricultural technologist, Sir John Bennet Lawes.

Profitability escaped the Lawes enterprise and the Farleigh Sugar Plantation Co. Ltd. closed in 1901. The estates were reopened in 1902 by a group of Bundaberg sugarmen. Sustained profitability escaped the new owners also and the Farleigh Estate Sugar Company Ltd. went into voluntary liquidation in 1926.

In those 24 years however, there developed in large degree, the basis on which the future security of Farleigh would depend.

On 7th May 1926, after vigorously argued takeover negotiations the supplying farmers took the mill "into their own hands" and Farleigh became Australia's first sugar co-operative, registered under the Primary Producers' Co-operative Associations Act of 1923.

Much of this book is about people whose lives made part of the story; people with wide interests and connections; colonials who thought nothing of going straight to Westminster to tackle a problem; planters and farmers who became members of Parliament and Ministers of the Crown; canegrowers who helped shape some of the major legislative controls and business decisions on which the operation of the Australian sugar industry is today based; Melanesians who were the backbone of the sugar industry's workforce for 40 years; migrant settlers from southern Europe and elsewhere who implanted new features on a predominantly Anglo-Celtic-Nordic community.

During the 1960's it became apparent that old identities who had direct connections with the pioneers and who in many cases had clear recollections of last century, were fast slipping away.

A research project was commissioned by Farleigh Board of Directors for a social history based on the "North Side" collective memory wherever possible, of aspects recalled as significant by people familiar with Farleigh's formative years.

The story seeks to dramatise, within the disciplines of factuality, influences which, locally, nationally and abroad, have combined to shape the Australian sugar industry and which have given Farleigh's people their own particular sense of identity within the general spirit of the wider North Queensland community.

S.O. Gordon.

Chairman of Directors.



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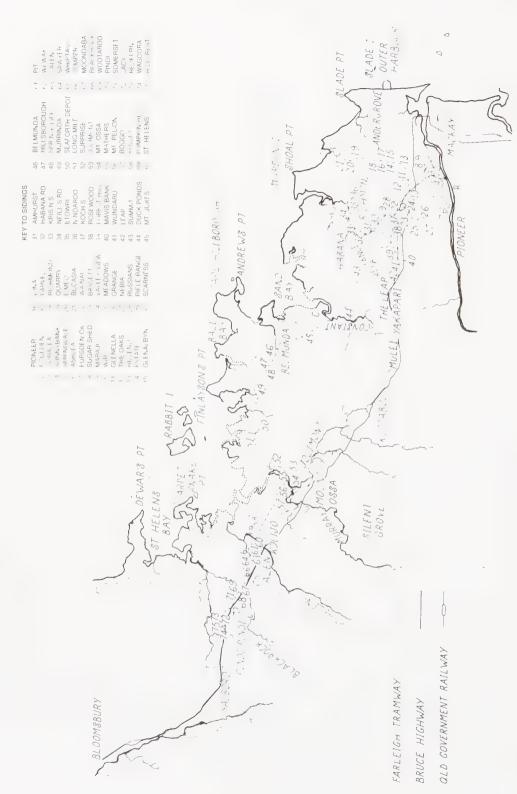
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SHOAL PI BUCASIA THE ORPHANAGE EIMEO BLACK'S \BEACH SLADE PT. NINDAROO COCKPEN WOODLANDS RICHMOND. SLADE 1. INVERNESS ARAGH THE CEDARS BEACONSFIELD NORBROOK GLENALBYN RIVER ESTATE NORTH BASSETT MT OSCAR CROKER'S HILL CRAIGLEA HILLEND CORVO BALDHILL 6005 LEIGH BASIN ONEER FURSDEN SHED RD ELBOW RIVER RIVER ESTATE RIVER EAST PT MACKAY FOULDEN HERMITAGE FOULDEN CROSSING The Farleigh section of the North Side showing present roads, old plantation mills (identified by small black squares) and historic place names.

GREEN I



Farleigh's tramway system showing Bruce Highway and Government railway.

## The Author

The author grew up on a cane farm at Kolijo, pioneered by his father in 1923. He is a Farleigh cane grower and was formerly a director of the mill. His earliest recollections of Farleigh are as a child when his father was a director during the mill's turbulent years of the early 1930's. As a journalist after World War 2 he met many old residents who clearly recalled 19th century life in the Farleigh districts and became intrigued by the sense of drama they seemed to attach to memories of the various Farleigh enterprises.

# **Author's Acknowledgments**

The author's thanks are extended to many people and organisations for providing help with research. The *Daily Mercury* allowed ready access to files and records over many years. A fine framework of events on which a story of this kind can be built is contained in three books: John Kerr's *Pioneer Pageant*, Harry T. Easterby's *The Queensland Sugar Industry* and Aneas Munro's *The Sugar Fields of Mackay*.

One hopes the generalised handling of aspects of the Melanesian story might draw attention to specialised work in this field by Dr. Clive Moore and Dr. Kay Saunders, whose interest and assistance were most welcome.

T.G. Mulherin's diary, Farleigh documents provided by T.W. Penny and recollections of Colin McGown, tied together much of the mill story of the first 30 years of the twentieth century.

Ready co-operation over a long period from the Queensland State Archives, The John Oxley Library, the Queensland Parliamentary Library and the *Australian Sugar Journal* is gratefully acknowledged.

Many Farleigh employees and staff members assisted. One has happy recollections of long talks with Bernie Wright, Mervyn Wright, Reg Andrew, Bert Jackson and Tom Coogan.

Cooperation of Basil Graham of Mackay, in the reproduction of many old photographs, from which most of those used were selected, is acknowledged.

Appreciation is extended to Farleigh directors and management for freedom to use all Association documents asked for without any direction on the nature of the story, beyond Tom Mulherin's original brief to follow up old timers' recollections and 'tell it as people remembered it'.

#### **Old Identities**

Contacts with old residents who had clear recollections of the North Side and Mackay district generally up to 1914 are in themselves part of the story. These included: Louis Desbois, of Majuba Hill and Craiglea.

Mrs. Louis Desbois, daughter of Harry Murry.

T.G. and J.M. Mulherin, sons of Patrick Mulherin of Avondale.

- J.H. Williams (sen), pioneer Mackay broadcaster, machinery and vehicle agent and owner of the "4MK" Museum in Sydney Street, Mackay, in the 1950's and his son J.H. Williams, pioneer broadcaster and local historian who helped spark an early interest in North Side history.
- D.L.S. Williams, former Mackay Ambulance superintendent.
- P.J., J.R. and A.A. McDermott, sons of Patrick McDermott, teamster and pioneer settler at St. Helens.

Mrs. E. Griffin and Mrs. W. Dawe, daughters of Patrick McDermott.

R.I. Robinson, born Miclere plantation 1883; grew up at Habana and became Chairman of Directors at Farleigh.

Mrs. W. May, daughter of John Donnelly of Habana and Farleigh districts.

Mrs. I. Pratt (nee Johansen), born at Habana in 1887, wife of Wm. Pratt, pioneer of St. Helens sugar lands.

Miss Dorothy Croker, daughter of James Croker.

James McCready, son of Hugh McCready.

Mrs. James McCready, daughter of John Allen, Mackay businessman who arrived in Mackay 1866.

Gilbert Martin, son of Robert Martin of Hamilton and Mandurana.

E.E., S. and W.R. Dunn, sons of Samuel Dunn of Chelona, a Homebush cane supplier.

Mrs. E.E. (Grace) Dunn, daughter of F.J. Stevens of Colton Vale.

Mrs. Bob Gibson (nee Jorgensen) whose father performed tradesman's work for Nellie Armstrong (Madam Melba) at Marian; daughter-in-law of Andrew Gibson.

Garnet L. Buss, nephew of Frederic Buss.

Mrs. A.E. Smith, daughter of Mrs. M. Ryan of Branscombe and Pioneer.

George Wright, grandson of Levi Wills of River Estate and son of Harry Wright of Pioneer Estate.

Colin McGown, son of Farleigh Estate Sugar Company Ltd. manager James McGown.

Patrick Wyse, settler and son of a settler on St. Helens and Jolimont resumed lands. W.R., R. and A. Denman, sons of Edward Denman.

George Fordyce, son of W.B. Fordyce.

Noel Manning, former Farleigh director and former director of the *Mackay Daily Mercury*.

Geatano Zammit and Sam Portelli, Joe Camilleri and G. Bonanno supplied recollections of early Maltese settlement. John Camilleri, Frank Deguara and Joe Ellul assisted in this research.

Vince Aprile supplied many details of his father's generation of Italian settlers.

Mrs. Madge Crear (nee Krisin), John Sologinkin and Nick Kotchevatkin provided details of Russian settlers.

#### **Diaries and Papers**

Printed memoirs or collections of press correspondence (memoirs and letters) and private papers referred to include: T.G. Mulherin (diary); P. Kirwan (printed letters and memoirs); A.J. Coyne (address to Mackay Sugar Manufacturers 19–12–1961); David Coyne (memoirs D.M. 25–6–1931); A.G. Muller (reprint of diaries); J.T. O'Riordan (reprint of diaries); Edward Denman (collected Press letters and news reports); Sir William Macartney (Press letters and recollections of conversations); Robert Ryan (Press letters); R.D. Dunne (Press letters and printed memoirs); Wm. Pratt (papers); F. Buss (grandson of Frederic Buss) — (papers); Noel Manning (papers); John Smith (letters); H.W.J. Gunning (papers and Press letters); Fordyce family records.

#### Abbreviations of journals and publications referred to:

- A.S.J., The Australian Sugar Journal.
- B.C., Brisbane Courier; B.I., Bowen Independent: B.M., Bundaberg Mail; B.N.M. Bundaberg News-Mail.
- C.W., The Canegrower Weekly (Mackay).
- D.M., Daily Mercury, including Jubilee Edition 1912.
- I.M., Illustrated Mercury 1910.
- M.C., Mackay Chronicle; M.M. Mackay Mercury (and South Kennedy Advertiser); M.S., Mackay Standard.
- P.A., Pugh's Almanac; P.D.T., Port Denison Times; P. and F., Planter and Farmer; Port Mackay, abbreviation for The Discovery and Development of Port Mackay, Queensland, by H. Ling Roth; P.P., Pioneer Pageant by J. Kerr; P.R., The Producers' Review.
- Q.S.I., The Queensland Sugar Industry, by H.T. Easterby; Q.T., Queensland Times (per J. Kerr and G. Bond).
- S.I.Q., *The Sugar Industry in Queensland*, by H. Ling Roth; S.J.T.C., *The Sugar Journal and Tropical Cultivator*; S.P.E., *South Pacific Enterprise* (published by the C.S.R. Company).
- T.Q., The Queenslander; T.S.F.M., The Sugar Fields of Mackay.
- V. and P., Votes and Proceedings of the Queensland Parliament.

# Abbreviations of Sugar Organisations, Companies, Legislation and Workers' Unions:

- A.J.S. Bank, Australian Joint Stock Bank; A.S.P.A., Australian Sugar Producers' Association; A.W.A., Amalgamated Workers' Association; A.W.U., Australian Workers' Union.
- B.S.E.S., Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations.
- C.S.C.P.B., Central Sugar Cane Prices Board (known as the Central Board).
- F.E.S. Co., The Farleigh Estate Sugar Co. Ltd.; F.L.C.P.B., Farleigh Local Cane Prices Board (known as the Farleigh Local Board); F.M.S.C. Farleigh Mill Suppliers' Committee.
- I.S.A., International Sugar Agreement.
- L.P.A., Local Producers' Association.
- M.A.C., Mackay Agricultural Conference; M.C.G.E., Mackay Cane Growers' Executive (affiliate of A.S.P.A.); M.D.C.G.E., Mackay District Cane Growers' Executive; M.F.L., Mackay Farmers' League (affiliate of A.S.P.A.); M.M.S.C., Melbourne–Mackay Sugar Company; M.P.A., Mackay Planters' Association; M.P.F.A., Mackay Planters' and Farmers' Association.
- N.B.A., The National Bank of Australasia Ltd.
- P.R.F.A., Pioneer River Farmers' Association; P.R.F.G.A., Pioneer River Farmers' and Graziers' Association.

- Q.C.G.A., Queensland Cane Growers' Association; Q.C.G.C., Queensland Cane Growers' Council; Q.P.A., Queensland Producers' Association; Q.S.S.C.T., Queensland Society of Sugar Cane Technologists.
- S.C.G.U.A., Sugar Cane Growers' Union of Australia; S.R.I., Sugar Research Institute; S.W.G.A., Sugar Works Guarantee Act (1893); S.W.U., Sugar Workers' Union.
- U.C.G.A., United Cane Growers' Association.

#### **Reference Sources**

C.A.C., Corporate Affairs Commission.

M.C.C., Mackay City Council; M.H.S., Mackay Historical Society.

P.S.C., Pioneer Shire Council.

Q.H.S., Queensland Historical Society; Q.P.L., Queensland Parliamentary Library; Q.S.A., Queensland State Archives.

J.O.L., John Oxley Library.

#### Books and documents referred to:

Frontiersman by Jean Farnfield.

History of Cardwell Shire by Dorothy Jones.

History of Rockhampton by J.T.S. Bird.

In the Early Days by Edward Palmer.

Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament 1860-1929 by D.B. Waterson.

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A Thousand Miles Away by Dr. G.C. Bolton.

Four Years in Queensland by E.B. Kennedy.

John Drysdale and the Burdekin by Roy Connolly.

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Memoirs of the Hon. Sir Robt. Philp K.C.M.G. 1851-1922 by Harry C. Perry.

The Pacific Islander Hospitals in Colonial Queensland by Dr. Kay Saunders, Journal of Pacific History Vol 2 Parts 1 and 2.

Melanesians in North Queensland: Retention of Religious and Magical Practices by P.M. Mercer and C.R. Moore, Journal of Pacific History Vol 2 Parts 1 and 2.

The Question of Japanese Immigration to Queensland in 19th Century by John B. Armstrong.

Sugar Country by C.T. Wood.

Minutes Mackay Planters' Association.

Minutes United Cane Growers' Association.

Minutes Kolijo zone, Queensland Producers' Association.

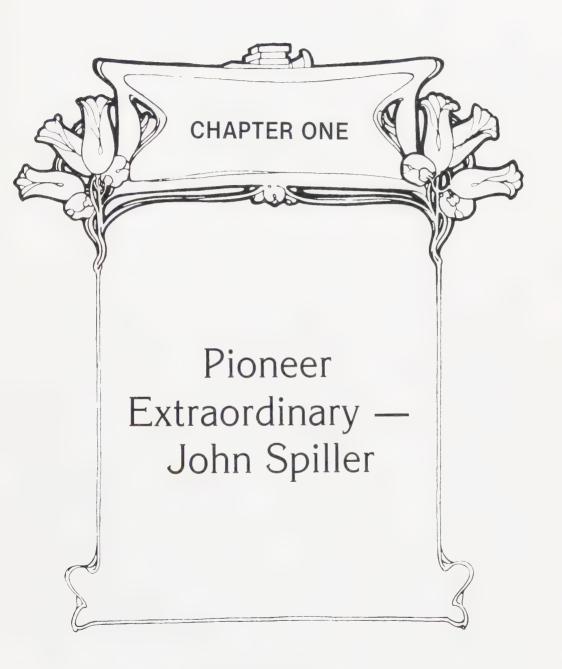
Reports of Royal Commissions and Committees of Enquiry from Australian Sugar Producers' Association, Queensland Parliamentary Library (assistance by Mr. G.H. Muntz M.L.A. acknowledged), The *Daily Mercury*, Farleigh Mill records.

Full Court report of Powell v Farleigh, Kirwan v Farleigh and Boese v Farleigh, courtesy S.B. Wright & Wright and Condie.

#### A gallery of chairmen of the Farleigh Co-operative Sugar Milling Association Ltd. 1926-1983



Farleigh chairman of directors in 1983. Mr G.O. Gordon is standing in the Joyer of the Farleigh Mill administration building. Pictures of the Association's previous chairmen (from L. to R.) are: K.J. White, E. Evans, T.G. Mulherin (foundation chairman), W.B. Fordyce and R.I. Robinson. The portrait of T.G. Mulherin was painted by Miss L. McCausland.



#### Part one

# THE NORTH SIDE

The North Side was never a precise geographic entity, although from the early years of the Pioneer River section of the District of Kennedy, it was often spelled with capitals.

The name to some evoked images of a rough sparsley settled tract north of the river, stretching from the agricultural lands close in, encompassing the pastoral runs of Balnagowan and Hamilton and with some vagueness extending northwards and eastwards to a distant coast. Much of the indistinct north was occupied by the four St. Helens runs which became Jolimont, St. Helens and Bloomsbury stations. In the intermediate section between these runs and the near township environs, a mountainous region contains the peaks of Jukes and Blackwood. Between this area and the sea lay the runs of Seaforth and Forest Hill.

Many early settlers would have disagreed with this wide geographic spread as an accurate description. Edward Denman of Etowrie for instance did not include Pioneer Estate and Nebia in the "North Side" as he recalled it in 1872, saying that those localities were regarded as River Bank Estates.

In any case as settlement progressed, the wider image focused inwards and the closer image broadened so that the locality came to be regarded as beginning with J.G. Barnes' Cremorne Gardens on a 12 acre block opposite the township of Mackay, extending up the river to the vicinity of Balnagowan homestead, down stream to the sea and up the coast to Eimeo and confined on its northern extremities by a line running roughly from Balnagowan, past the mountain called The Leap, across Barrow Hill and reaching the coast near Green Island.

In Farleigh's lexicon of place names, the area of the northern runs is called the North Coast. The central region of Seaforth and Forest Hill is called Seaforth.

John Spiller planted Mackay district's first commercial cane on the north side of the river in June 1865. Not until 58 years later was cane grown commercially on the North Coast and not until almost 40 years after that were Seaforth lands planted. These three Farleigh districts, the North Side (the mill end), North Coast and Seaforth spread lineally over more than 80 kilometres and abut the Proserpine mill area from which Farleigh in 1981 absorbed a few farms. Substantial tonnages from these areas also go to Pleystowe and Marian.

Balnagowan connects only incidentally with the Farleigh district story through an association of Edward Maitland Long (of the North Side plantations of River Estate and Habana), with John Cook and the Pleystowe Central Mill. It was the second run to be stocked in Mackay district (in September 1862) and the first on the North Side. It was originally tendered for by one of the exploring party led by 21-year-old John Mackay, who in May 1860 discovered the river which, urged by his companions, he named the Mackay.

John Mackay returned in January 1862 and stocked Greenmount on the south side. In August at Fort Cooper, which was then a staging centre for teams working into new

country, David Starr and two companions, Monteith and Vince met Mackay with news that Mackay's partner James Starr was facing foreclosure by his mortgagees, James Dickson and Co. of Sydney.

Mackay decided to sell his Pioneer River runs and then hurried south to discuss his position with his agent, Mansfield, at Rockhampton. He seems to have believed he had right of ownership to a North Side run which he called Shamrock Vale, although it was unstocked and John McCrossin of his 1860 party, and not Mackay, had tendered for it.

At Denison Creek on the way out of the valley he met Louis Gerald Ross and James Muggleton droving a mob of nearly 1000 head, and which was in a noticeable state of stress. The cattle had come from the run of John Cook of Serpentine River near Armidale. Cook had left the party at Rockhampton and returned South. Mackay believed he made a verbal agreement on the spot to sell Shamrock Vale to Ross. Ross occupied the run and formally acquired it in March 1863. He named it Balnagowan. He and Cook ran it as partners. Ross was drowned at Balnagowan during floods in 1870 and when Mackay subsequently, and very belatedly, asked Cook for a settlement, Cook disclaimed liability.<sup>2</sup>

About the time Ross and Cook acquired Balnagowan a long, lean bushman was having trouble with a mob of sheep farther south. Jim Martin, 6 ft. 4 ins. tall, immensely strong, with an extraordinary capacity for work and the particular patience required of a good sheep drover, was weatherbound at Yaamba with sheep bound for Dr. J. Wilkin's Eaglefield run. To validate his title, Wilkin had to stock the run by 1st April 1863. Veteran cattleman, G.F. Bridgman, himself a drover of heroic achievement, has recalled the story.<sup>3</sup>

An unfriendly neighbour had stock on the boundary ready to occupy the place if Wilkin's sheep did not arrive. Jim Martin chafed as the weeks filtered away and rain continued. Finally he force marched the strongest of his mob, swam them over flooded creeks and arrived at Eaglefield the night before the regulation time was up.

James Martin and his brother Robert were the sons of Dr. James Martin of Leadhills, Lanarchshire and who at one time attended the Duke of Wellington. Another brother Charles came to Queensland but then went to South Africa. James and Robert were a popular pair of extroverts in the small Port Mackay community. They set up Hamilton, which Robert applied for on 28th November 1863. He and James applied for and added Hopetoun to it on 5th December 1865. Mt. Martin, on Hamilton, is named for Jim Martin. He died on 12th August 1879 and was buried there.

Many tales of Bob Martin have passed into North Side folklore. Once, as a Justice of the Peace, it fell his turn to hear charges against a group of locals who had celebrated too boisterously. It so happened he also had taken part in the offending rollicking and had been apprehended with the others. Undeterred, on the day of judgment he dealt with the miscreants one by one and when his own name came up, fined himself with an admonishment never to let such disgraceful behaviour occur again.

In 1878 he shifted to Mandurana on the North Side, where he died in March 1898 of heart failure brought on by pneumonia contracted during cyclone Eline. In accordance with his wishes he was buried under a blue gum in the churchyard cemetery of St. Peter's Church at Mandurana. His wife was long remembered as a matriarchal

community figure in the Mandurana-Coningsby area. Members of the family still

grow cane in the locality.

Blacks killed many cattle in the early years. The punitive expeditions which followed all too often degenerated into murderous hunts. Old timers later were loath to recall details and many station workers, after participating once or twice in the line of duty, found they had little stomach for cold blooded killing excursions.

Straightforward battles when whites acted from reasonably legitimate motives of defence of persons and property were more readily recalled. Robert Ryan (of Mt. Martin in 1932) recalled a battle the Martins fought at Hamilton on the second Sunday of December 1864, in which the local Aboriginal "King", called Mungo by the whites, was killed.<sup>4</sup>

The recollection was prompted by public discussion about a group of men, several of whom had aristocratic connections, which had climbed Mt. Dalrymple. Ryan told of an exploration of Eungella in 1883, from Pinnacle Station, by Hamilton manager J.A. Brennan, Ryan, and Brennan's Aboriginal stockman Spoonbill. Ryan rated Spoonbill the aristocrat of that team as he was the only surviving son of Mungo.

Old bushmen would guardedly concede the worst excesses of action against Aboriginals were an unpardonable over-reaction, which nevertheless took place in circumstances in which economic survival of herds and runs, as well as white lives were threatened. They certainly conceded small right of opinion to white moralists declaiming in civilised comfort. Many saw as great a tragedy in the degeneration of Aboriginals which took place within 30 years of white settlement.

Physically, Aboriginals rarely measured up to a usually highly sentimentalised nineteenth century white man's image of a "noble savage"; but bushmen who understood the practicalities of survival in the wild respected Aboriginals for their mastery of their environment even though that respect may not always have stayed their reprisals for spearing of cattle.

Aboriginal stockmen "out bush", adapting their skills to ensuring survival of the white men's herds "rode high" without comprehending the profit motive which was the basis of their employment. In a few years most Aboriginals had been herded or had become spontaneously attracted to white-planned settlements. Edward Denman referred to "poor human derelicts" in such a "camp" on the immediate North Side, just down stream from Jack Barnes' Cremorne Gardens.

Denman recalled that the first Aboriginals he saw (and with whom he appeared to have established an immediate empathy) were men and women of very fine stature at Dulverton on the North Side in 1872. They were all naked when he met them so first impressions would have been firm impressions.

Many years later he and Robert Bridgman (brother of G.F. Bridgman) and a few other discerning observers were to remark on and deplore a general ethnic dispiritedness among the survivors. A millenium of environmental mastery passed out of the capacity of these semi-urbanised black people in a few years. The near North Side's most distinctive landmark, The Leap, recalls a typical punitive expedition against Aboriginals.

J.G. Barnes was speared by blacks in broad daylight. Robert Ryan has related that an Aboriginal named Charcoal who was at one time wanted for murder and who was finally drowned at Mt. Bassett, told him that Barnes was speared for desecrating sacred sites.<sup>5</sup>

(Robert Ryan believed himself to have been the first white child born on the North Side. His father worked for John Spiller in 1866 and Robert recalled a happy association with the Spiller family in his childhood years.)

Mounted police were detailed to "disperse" the culprits after the Barnes incident, "disperse" meaning to uproot their camp, thus making women and children part of the quarry. One group retreated high up Mt. Johansburg where a woman fell, or jumped, or was pushed to her death. Legend has it she was carrying a baby girl wrapped in a shawl found to have belonged to a family named Price, who had recently been massacred.

In any case Mr. and Mrs. Jim Ready, both of whom as pioneer overlanders seemed to have developed a substantial rapport with the blacks, took in a baby girl after the "dispersal" action was completed. The mountain was subsequently renamed The Leap and often called Black Gin's Leap.

Mrs. M.J. Coughlin, a daughter of the Readys, has written that the girl, christened Johanna Hazeldine and called Judy, grew up with the Readys but the baptismal certificate records only Johanna (with no surname) baptised by Rev. Fr. T.A. Lonergan on the same day (22nd July 1867) as the Ready's daughter Mary. James and Mary Ready are named as Johanna's sponsors.<sup>6</sup>

Records seem to agree that Johanna married a white man named Howes or Howard. Their daughter Esme became a Sister of Mercy and their son, Bill, was decorated for saving a man from a shark at the North Side beach spot of Eimeo.

By 1867 the threads of circumstances which combined to produce the Farleigh story were beginning to converge from widely separated events. The future lay not so much with thousands of square miles of cattle country but with cane plots measured in tens and hundreds of acres; and a new drama of interaction among whites and blacks developed with the importation of Pacific Islanders to work those plots.

<sup>1.</sup> The name was changed to avoid confusion with the northern stream, the name of which was changed from the Mackay to the Tully River.

<sup>2.</sup> John Mackay's diaries; notes held at D.M., Q.H.S.; Balnagowan early details are related in *Pioneer Pageant* pp 10–12.

<sup>3.</sup> D.M. Jubilee Issue 1912.

<sup>4.</sup> D.M. 2-1-1932.

<sup>5.</sup> D.M. 13-9-1922.

<sup>6.</sup> D.M. 1-9-1931. Copy of baptismal certificates sighted by courtesy Mr. Michael Scott, a descendant of the Readys.

#### Part two

# SUGAR

John Mackay set out from Armidale on 26th July 1861 "with 1200 head of mixed cattle, 50 horses and two teams of bullocks" to stock the runs he had marked out on the Mackay river the previous year.

The previous year at Ormiston, outside Brisbane, the Hon. Louis Hope had

carefully nurtured a 20 acre block of sugar cane.

In April, 1862, back on his river, soon to be named the Pioneer, Mackay was anxiously watching for the overdue supply cutter, *Presto* from the top of Scrubby Hill (near today's township of Walkerston). About the same time in Brisbane, John Buhot, lately from Barbados, produced a small quantity of sugar from cane grown in Brisbane's botanic gardens, "in three iron pots . . . . . boiled at night by the uncertain light of a candle".<sup>2</sup>

Optimism sparked by the best world sugar prices in more than a quarter of a century was beginning to flare. On 6th June, Mackay was talking with Kennedy District Lands Commissioner G.E. Dalrymple at Mt. Funnell and at Ormiston Louis Hope watched John Buhot make five pounds of dark sugar from Hope's canes.<sup>3</sup>

On 8th August, about the time Mackay got news of Starr's bankruptcy, the *Young Australia* anchored in Moreton Bay. British Army Captain, Claudius Buchanan Whish disembarked and soon afterwards established Oakland plantation at Caboolture and won for himself, if not a fortune, a sure place in Australia's sugar story.<sup>4</sup>

Later in 1862 T.H. Fitzgerald, a civil engineer from New Zealand began a survey for the Queensland Government of a telegraph line from Rockhampton to Port Mackay on the Pioneer. Fitzgerald had visited Ormiston. In 1863, the survey job done, he laid out a street plan for Port Mackay and by the end of 1864 had pegged large tracts of agricultural land along the Pioneer. He took up 5,000 acres of these for himself or for friends and nominees.<sup>5</sup>

The next event of importance in this sequence and the event which can be taken as the beginning of the Farleigh sugar story, was the arrival of John Spiller, a dour Devonshireman, recently from Java. Few details of Spiller's movements prior to mid 1865 are available. Ling Roth has recorded that he gained sugar experience in Java on the plantation of Herr Moddeman, at Pasoeroean, near Sourabaya.<sup>6</sup>

Ling Roth's *Port Mackay* provides some of the few precise details of Spiller's early activity in Queensland: "From Java, Spiller brought 30,000 plants to Melbourne, where on arrival, owing to the long voyage of 59 days, many of the plants were beginning to wither and decay. He therefore left the whole lot with the Hon. Capt. Louis Hope of Cleveland Bay, who planted them and sent Spiller half the produce. In the meantime Spiller arrived at Mackay and on tramping around on the north side of the river was struck by the luxuriant growth of the native grasses. To use his own words: 'I always remember so well the grass being so high there my Javanese boy and myself being very much startled by a bullock rushing past us and we could not see but



John Spiller. Photo from "Port Mackay" by H. Ling Roth, courtesy Rowan Croker.

afterwards picked up its tracks. The first grass I burned was on the Pioneer and it was 12 ft. and over in height. It was what is known in Java as sugar grass; it contained saccharine and was quite sweet at the joints . . . . . I could see the fire burning in the ranges for four days afterwards.' ''

Spiller found the ground cover consisted of "barley and kangaroo grass, wild oats and an endless variety of herbs which both horses and cattle are very fond of."

He selected two blocks. One later became Branscombe Estate on the south side and the other he named Pioneer Estate on the North Side. Ling Roth says he planted the first cane at Pioneer on 1st June 1865. Presumably this was produce Hope sent up from the withered Java stock.<sup>8</sup>

The date has been questioned but it is certain the planting was made in the winter of 1865. A count back of months therefore, places Spiller in South Queensland early in 1864, or even late 1863. This estimate is based on the fact that in the Brisbane climate the Java plants would have taken at least a year to grow since canes in the south then needed 18 months to mature.

He had plenty of opportunity to learn about the Pioneer Valley. Mackay was declared a port of entry in November 1862 and a port of clearance in January 1863. During the following 18 months public discussion and a lot of departmental thought centred around the potential of northern agriculture and the type of land tenure best suited to its development. Much more was heard about the potential for Bowen than of the Pioneer, due in no small measure to an aggressive publicity policy of a future friend of Spiller's, George Smith.

A group of sugar men from Mauritius visited Bowen in 1864 and early in 1865 J.F. Kelsey formed the Bowen Sugar Company (George Smith was a partner) but the enterprise floundered after three seasons. Brisbane botanic gardens director Walter

Hill began an official trip north to report on northern potential in late 1864 and his trip was widely discussed long before the report came out.

Spiller wrote in *The Queenslander* about November 1868 that he had then been at Mackay for about three and a half years. This puts the date he took up permanent residence at Pioneer Estate on the North Side about May 1865. From then on his activities are more fully recorded.

It is known Spiller's household was established by June 1865. Robert Ryan has related that in June 1865 blacks from Black Mountain (he called it Blackfellow's Mountain) under the leadership of a warrior known as Long Toe, attacked the Spiller settlement while the men folk were away. Bob and Jim Martin arrived to avert a tragedy and had high praise for the bravery of the two women of the household.<sup>9</sup>

Pioneer Estate comprised Sugar Selection No. 33 (Por. 36 Parish of Bassett, 394 acres) and Sugar Selection No. 34 (Por. 35 Parish of Bassett, 325 acres). Originally Spiller applied for Por. 36 and this was approved on 4th August 1865. His brother-in-law, John Crees, applied for Por. 35 and this was approved on 11th September 1865. 10

Application dates are not known but it seems that if Spiller made his initial planting on 1st June 1865 he did so as a squatter. Of course if he had arranged for Hope to send up the promised canes, expecting earlier approval of his selections, he would have had little option but to plant them and risk making a satisfactory arrangement with whomever was the successful applicant.

Spiller was in a better position than many applicants who were rejected for blocks at this time. He was on the spot, ready to take up residence. He had arranged to share seed cane with Fitzgerald and Fitzgerald was the Government officer who would report on his blocks. Spiller had limited capital and was therefore under pressure to establish an income. About this time he applied for Sugar Selection No. 40 (Branscombe) — but more of that later. The question of the date of Spiller's first planting has led to much debate since there is only circumstantial evidence to support 1st June 1865.

On 2nd June 1877 the *Mackay Mercury* said: "Twelve years ago yesterday Mr. John Spiller planted a small quantity of sugar cane he brought with him from Java, upon the north bank of the Pioneer River. The spot selected was about five miles from Mackay and was very appropriately named Pioneer Plantation in consequence of its being situated on the river of the same name, its appropriateness being increased by the fact that Mr. Spiller was a pioneer of the sugar industry in this district."

The article later referred again to Spiller as "the pioneer of an important industry in this district". Spiller obviously had been at pains to accommodate the reporter and as he often corrected printed inaccuracies it seems unlikely this report would have remained uncorrected if it had been wrong.

On 7th June 1879 the *Mackay Mercury* reported that a new tramway for Pioneer Plantation had been landed from the *Yaralla* — 200 tons of railway iron to be laid from Pioneer mill to the back of the estate "for the purpose of conveying firewood and sugar cane to the mill". The same issue reported: "Last Monday (i.e. 1st June 1879) the first tramway in the district was commemorated by turning the first sod in the presence of a few ladies and gentlemen. The day is also memorable as being that day 14 years ago when Mr. Spiller planted the first sugar cane plants on the Pioneer River". There was no contradiction from the small community in which someone was bound to have known the facts.

On 5th December 1877 the Mackay Mercury reported a dinner given by Spiller in his

capacity as manager of River Estate honoring Mr. C.B. de Lissa for his success with the monosulphite sugar recovery process. Captain W.R. Goodall, Police Magistrate and Land Commissioner, proposed a toast to "the sugar planting interests" and called Spiller "the pioneer".

H.B. Black, editor of the *Mackay Standard* said it was 12 years since the industry had first been introduced by Mr. Spiller and eight years since the first mill was erected, by a gentleman they all respected — Mr. Fitzgerald. The kind reference to Fitzgerald is noteworthy. It was obvious Black believed Spiller and not Fitzgerald (as has been since suggested) planted the first cane but it seems also likely that Black intended to soften the recollection that Fitzgerald had left the district and had been declared insolvent the previous year. The worth of Black's remark is somewhat reduced by the fact that it was nine years, not eight, since the Alexandra mill had been built and he failed to mention the part John Ewen Davidson played in it as Fitzgerald's partner.

Two eye witnesses have affirmed that Spiller's initial Pioneer Estate planting was the district's first. It is generally agreed the first plants arrived in only a few boxes. Indeed no great quantity would have been available after Hope took his half of the produce of the time ravaged Java stocks. Ling Roth says the first cane, when planted, occupied about 40 yards square.

If the well established early practice of planting "on the square" with 5 ft. 6 ins. or even 7 ft. spaces was followed, not many plants would have been required. Another early pattern with 5 ft. 6 ins. between rows and two or three feet between plants would still have required a small number of plants for 40 yards square. (A square pattern 7 ft. by 7 ft. seems to have been a ruse to comply with sugar lease requirements at smallest cost to the selector.)

In December 1910 the *Illustrated Mercury* reviewed Mackay district's first 50 years. This stirred local argument as to whether Spiller or Fitzgerald was the sugar pioneer. It has never been disputed that Donald Beaton provided the boat or punt which conveyed Spiller's first plants from Port Mackay to Pioneer Estate. On 23rd May 1911 his widow wrote: "I Frances Debora Jamima Mary Byrne-Clarke, Donald Beaton's widow, declare that I was in Mackay in the year 1864. There was no conveyance to carry cane plants and Jack Seaton, Manila boy, Mr. Spiller and Donald Beaton were the first to plant in Mackay, they taking the plants up the river in a row boat built by Donald Beaton, to Pioneer." Mrs. Beaton is obviously a year out in her recollection.

A cameo article on Mrs. Beaton in the *Mercury Jubilee Issue* of August 1912 quotes her as saying that the plants were punted upstream to Pioneer in "a couple of dozen small boxes". In the same publication James Robb, who arrived at Mackay in September 1862 with his uncle Andrew Henderson, and who later built a horse mill at The Lagoons, wrote: "The first cane plants were brought from Java by Mr. Spiller. I afterwards saw them growing in his garden on the north side of the river, but Mr. Fitzgerald was the first to introduce cane in any quantity."

Pioneer grazier and stock and station agent T.S. Beatty sent a copy of the *Illustrated Mercury* to an old Mackay identity. On 6th September 1911 he published his friend's reply in the *Daily Mercury*: "It will be 46 years next month when I arrived at Port Mackay on *Diamantina* (Captain Champion). Spiller and his wife were on board and had a lot of sugar cane on board. I understood at the time it was the first cane to reach Mackay. I well remember when the *Diamantina* hauled into the wharf. There were among many others I think, six children, all girls, of Mr. Fitzgerald, surveyor, 18

months to two years between each." In fact Fitzgerald's family finally comprised eight sons and three daughters. One son later wrote that his father shifted the family from Rockhampton to Mackay in July 1865.

It is likely the *Diamantina* shipment was Spiller's first import after he planted his original Java-Ormiston stocks. Spiller crushed canes in November 1867 and more from the same plot in February 1868. These were two-years-old and would therefore have come from plants which arrived about the time of the *Diamantina* shipment. Spiller credited Fitzgerald with having provided the first commercial impetus: "Eighteen months ago (i.e. mid 1867) sugar planting was commenced in the district with a spirit which the returns of Messrs. Davidson and Co. will prove bye and bye". John Ewen Davidson and T.H. Fitzgerald were then partners at Alexandra Plantation.<sup>13</sup>

Fitzgerald is believed to have planted his first cane at Mackay in 1866 but the date is not known. John Ryan, his chainman when he surveyed the town and a later long time employee of the Pioneer Divisional Board is regarded as the man who did the planting. Ling Roth says: "In 1866, by arrangement, Spiller allowed T.H. Fitzgerald to have part of the crop due to him by Captain Hope. Fitzgerald also obtained some plants from Captain Whish at Redland Bay and with these he planted a piece of ground near the Roman Catholic schools".<sup>14</sup>

The schools were built later on land donated by Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald's first planting was made at the corner of Gregory and North streets (North is now River Street). The canes grew quickly as could have been expected on the scrub type soil. G.F. Bridgman says: "The first cane was planted at the end of 1865 or early in 1866. In July of the latter year there was a fine show of Bourbon cane on a half acre allotment near the Post Office". (i.e. where the Post Office was later built.)<sup>15</sup>

It seems likely Fitzgerald's plants came from part of Spiller's consignment remembered by T.S. Beatty's friend on the *Diamantina* in October 1865. In any case this plot gave the plants which shot the local sugar industry into prominence. Fitzgerald's son Mr. J.H. Fitzgerald believed his father's first planting was made in 1866. "As to who planted the first sugar cane, I had always understood that it was Mr. Spiller; but it was certainly my father who planted the first cane in quantity and that gave plants for the district later on."

<sup>1.</sup> Mackay's diary D.M. Jubilee Edition 1912 p 5.

<sup>2.</sup> Letter by botanic gardens director, Walter Hill quoted in Sugar Country by C.T. Wood.

<sup>3.</sup> Sugar Country.

<sup>4.</sup> Sugar Country.

<sup>5.</sup> Queensland by A.J. Boyd.

<sup>6.</sup> The Discovery and Development of Port Mackay, Queensland by H. Ling Roth, E.S. Rawson of The Hollow recorded that Spiller also had been in the West Indies.

<sup>7.</sup> Four Years in Queensland, by E.B. Kennedy.

<sup>8.</sup> Harold Finch Hatton in Advance Australia says 1st June but whether or not repeating Ling Roth is not certain.

<sup>9.</sup> Letter D.M. 13-9-1922.

<sup>10.</sup> Block designations and dates courtesy Q.S.A.

<sup>11.</sup> The *Illustrated Mercury* of 1910 commemorated John Mackay's discovery of the valley in 1860. The Jubilee Issue of 1912 commemorated first settlement in 1862.

- 12. A.S.J. August 1909.
- 13. T.Q. Nov. 1868; quoted by E.B. Kennedy in Four Years in Queensland.
- 14. Port Mackay by Ling Roth. There is a discrepancy here. C.B. Whish was then at Oaklands on the Caboolture River. (See Sugar Country by C.T. Wood); Ryan obit, D.M. 23-3-1926.
- 15. D.M. Jubilee Edition 1912.
- 16. A.S.J. Aug. 1909.

#### Part three

### **SPILLER**

Captain Whish one morning discussed his plantation business with Louis Hope over a protracted breakfast at the Queensland Club in Brisbane. John Spiller's "big plantation" background was of little avail for such social-business contacts in the remoteness of the Pioneer Valley; and his financial resources were slender. Sir Robert Philp recalled: "He was a plucky fellow, not easily overcome by difficulties and a good story is told to illustrate this quality. After he had made some progress with his first plantation he had occasion to visit Sydney but he had not the ready cash to pay his passage, so he sold one of his ploughs."

Not every Queensland cane planter was eligible for breakfast at the Queensland Club. The *Brisbane Courier* on 18th July 1865 observed that 18,293 acres had been granted to 23 individuals under the Sugar and Coffee Regulations and added that scarcely a farmer in the colony did not have his patch of cane.

It is easy to picture Spiller's early contacts with Fitzgerald, over a drink and probably a meal at Charles Keeley's Golden Fleece Hotel; the taciturn Devonshireman and the ebullient Irishman, both with wide horizons and self reliant; each an expert in a field the other had need to know about. Fitzgerald certainly grasped the chance to share Spiller's plants and no doubt advised Spiller where the best land lay.<sup>2</sup>

Spiller's Javanese boy mentioned by Ling Roth is probably the same lad Mrs. Beaton called "Jack Seaton", "Manila boy", and the "John Sheedon (aged 13), native of Java, known to Mr. Spiller", recorded as one of the early depositors in the Mackay branch of the Australian Joint Stock Bank when it opened in 1866.

John Spiller "planter" and T.H. Fitzgerald "surveyor" are among early bank entries. The manager Geo. Geddes made the first deposit on 10th February 1866. On 12th September 1866 the bank was robbed of £746/8/-. The "bushrangers", Geddes said, had hidden in Fitzgerald's cane which then was 15 or 16 feet high.

John Crees lived with the Spillers. The first residence was a thatched ground level

cottage near a large lagoon teeming with wild fowl and the home of more than one crocodile.'

Thick, low scrub (not tall rain forest), and innumerable palms fringed the North Side flats. E.B. Kennedy wrote: "In some spots nothing but whole groves of palms grow along the banks. The scrubs on each side abound in beautiful birds." 6

Spiller and Crees, under the Sugar and Coffee Regulations, had to pay one shilling per acre for their leases and were required to expend £1 per acre on development by the end of their third year. On 6th July 1868 Fitzgerald, as Government surveyor, inspected Pioneer Estate and reported to Surveyor General A.C. Gregory: "On No. 36, 28 acres are planted with canes, some of which are as fine as can be seen in any part of Queensland and on No. 35 I found 18 acres that had been recently planted but which gave every indication of an excellent crop. . . . . . On both of them the prospects of success are certain and the expenditure on each in building, fencing, clearing, ploughing and planting must have largely exceeded the required £1 per acre on the whole of the application."

Spiller straightway applied for a 10 year lease under Section 66 of the Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1868. He referred to both blocks as "my plantation" and signed his name "for self and agent for John Crees". Ten year leases signed by Governor Blackall on 30th June 1869 were granted, operative from 1st June 1869. On 15th February Crees had transferred Portion 35 to Spiller making the latter sole owner of

Pioneer Estate.

Spiller also secured 10 year leases on his Branscombe blocks so had obviously worked that estate as well. Branscombe consisted of Sugar Selection 30 (Pors. 28, 30 and 31, Parish of Greenmount, 336 acres) and Sugar Selection 40 (Pors. 27 and 29, Greenmount, 346 acres). John Spiller was the original selector but the date is uncertain. Spiller was granted 10 year leases on both selections (i.e. 30 and 40), issued on 19th March and 20th March 1869 respectively and dating from 1st July 1868. From these dates it seems likely that the selections had been made at approximately the same time as Spiller selected Pioneer Estate.

The Act of 1868 set the limits of agricultural selections between 20 and 640 acres. The range under the Sugar and Coffee Regulations had been 320 to 1,280 acres. In addition small first and second class pastoral blocks were allowed, down to 80 acres.

Most land cultivated before Spiller's, came under the Agricultural Reserves Act and details of this development seem not to have been kept. There were no big capitalists at Port Mackay in 1866 and on 13th September Fitzgerald asked J.P. Ball, Minister for Lands, to extend time to pay land purchase money "to enable settlers to obtain machinery for sugar and concrete making without having to incur heavy liabilities". He said he especially represented the planters of Mackay. A.C. Gregory approved and recommended extension of leases to 10 years but that improvements should still be made inside three years."

Much of the district cultivation up to 1866 seems to have been done on Fitzgerald's blocks. Three people, listed as Fitzgerald's agents, cultivated 162 acres as follows: Robert Wilson 75 acres; representatives of late T. Anderson 75 acres; representatives of late Thomas Dickson 12. Of the total, at least Wilson's was on the North Side and later became Foulden estate. Spiller then had 25 acres broken up, Alfred Hart Lloyd (adjoining Spiller) 10 and a Mr. Hutchinson 5.<sup>10</sup>

In 1866 Jos. Holmes lost a cotton crop at Pleystowe and on the North Side, opposite

the Port, J.G. Barnes had 12 acres he later named Cremorne Gardens. To these can be added Fitzgerald's half acre of cane at the Port and probably the early preparation of the first cultivation on Portion 39 Parish of Greenmount, soon to be called Alexandra.

Attention at that time was focused on the south side and particularly the Alexandra. Pioneer Estate was rarely mentioned by name. Thus in May 1867 the *Mackay Mercury* reported the 23 ft. *Early Dawn*, launched by Geo. Voysey for the river trade had brought three cargoes of maize from "Mr. Spiller's plantation several miles up the river".

Compared to Fitzgerald's, Spiller's early efforts were modest. Ling Roth says he grew maize and cotton while his cane multiplied — 13 bales of cotton to Brisbane earned the Government bounty of 4d. a lb. In one season he sold 6,000 bushells of maize to Thomas Hatfield of Broadsound at six shillings a bushell.<sup>11</sup>

In the early summer of 1867 a Mr. Booth from Java helped Spiller put up a wooden roller mill. It crushed a small quantity of cane (the trial already referred to by Spiller) and the juice was boiled in an ordinary boiler. Spiller said it registered 11 on Baume's saccharometer; the later February crushing registered 10.<sup>12</sup>

The upright wooden rollers were in place when Charles Walker, late manager of Thorne's station, Cotherstone, 40 miles from Clermont and a young German migrant, A.G. (Gus) Muller called in, prior to establishing Dumbleton plantation.<sup>13</sup>

After the first Dumbleton buildings were erected Muller went to Spiller. He was the only white man on the estate "besides Mrs. Spiller's brother and nephew". Arthur Ward was Pioneer overseer during 1866–67. In February 1867 John Altereith, who also had been in Java, was superintending work.<sup>14</sup>

Spiller secured 20 South Sea Islanders in May 1867. His handling of the labourers was characteristically thorough. "I made it my study", he said, "to learn their language so that I could make them understand me and I began putting them to their work. It required all the patience I could muster at first, but gradually they got acquainted with the different tools . . . . . and I am now reaping the benefit and proud to see, every morning, turning out for the field, four good ploughmen with their six bullocks each, and drivers and others with their horse teams that can mark out and draft as straight as I can."

"Not only do they do their work well, but are contented. I do not put them on rations. They get all they require of beef, sweet potatoes, yams, corn meat, green corn, arrowroot, sugar, molasses, with one plug of tobacco per week. Tea they do not care much about. When they want tea they are not afraid to ask for it."

"I find a great advantage in being able to talk with them and I think it has helped to make them fond of me. They also like this country very much and often ask me to keep them and get their wives over and let them have a bit of land. They are far from being so ignorant as is often supposed; they know well when their term of agreement expires but they would much prefer having their wives over here to returning to their native islands and in this I will certainly assist them if the Government will allow me to do so.""

Despite one or two aberrations, Spiller's actions indicate he handled his black labourers firmly and intelligently. Prompt action about 1875 defused a potentially serious issue involving Islanders' possession of firearms. While the Planters' Association moved for legislative control, Spiller went ahead and impounded all firearms on his estates without greatly upsetting the Islanders. He did have occasional

upsets. In mid-1868 a group of intransigent labourers hid in the cane, rejecting authority and conciliation with bows and arrows at the ready.

Perhaps some such troubles were due to Spiller's own frailties. Thus John Rolleston relates: "Hearing that John Spiller of Pioneer wanted a field overseer I applied for and got the job and found myself in charge of 100 naked savages from every island in the Pacific. Spiller warned me it required the utmost tact to manage them as several overseers ran away from the job. One day John, having partaken rather freely of his favourite beverage, undertook to show the cutters a thing or two in cane cutting. Now these same cutters, 12 in number, were as fine a specimen of the savage race as possibly could be found anywhere . . . . . They let off such a yell as only kanakas could fire off and went for Spiller . . . . . who just managed to get to his house in safety. They quietened down in an hour or two and came back to their work as if nothing had happened." 16

A.G. Muller had not remained long at Pioneer in 1867. He left after a disagreement. "Mr. Spiller was not always himself", he wrote. John Rolleston also, soon gave up his

job.

Spiller was a practical conservationist. He told Ling Roth he used the Pioneer lagoon as a larder but he closed it to indiscriminate shooting. The lagoon became a memorable sanctuary. A.G. Muller said Spiller would trap any rare bird and mount it with practised care. He viewed with distaste the destruction of scrubland on the estate. Spiller told Ling Roth he considered crocodiles poor sport, though he had one adventure with a saurian near his lagoon.

His setter disturbed a 9 ft. specimen which confronted Spiller only five feet away. "He drew the shot from both barrels of his gun and rammed down a couple of balls, tearing off a piece of his shirt to use as a patch and thereby ensuring a tight fit, but never taking his eyes off the 'alligator', which lay perfectly motionless. He told us afterwards that his hands shook so much from excitement that he could scarcely load. He must however have regained his coolness very quickly for he placed the ball so truly through the beast's eye that its eyelid was not injured." Spiller fired a second ball as the crocodile rushed past him and by the time help came it was dead. 17

Spiller was present at the landing of the first barramundi in the Pioneer, although E.B. Kennedy made the catch. E.S. Rawson recalled: "Let us not forget Ted Kennedy, discoverer in our waters, with the aid of a self made salmon fly, of the Palmer, the gigantic perch which has been found in north and north-east coast rivers; a big scaled fish with a ruby eye and a marked preference for spins over other lurements of destruction. Ted Kennedy and John Spiller were together at the first kill and christened the ruby eyed one 'the Palmer' because he was caught in a pool beneath some palm trees. By that name a great many of his race from one to 25 lbs. have since made sport and food for the white man".<sup>18</sup>

Rawson also recalled Pastor Edward Tanner, an unusual Anglican clergyman, and Port Mackay's first. He owned a farm adjoining Kennedy and thus was a close neighbour of Spiller. He had a mango variety named after him. He later went to Bundaberg where he became a sugar industry pioneer. E.B. Kennedy, Charles James King and T.H. Fitzgerald in partnership, first planned to develop Meadowlands plantation but King died, aged 28, of a heart complaint and Fitzgerald continued on his own.<sup>19</sup>

Kennedy was a keen fisherman and saw every tropic watercourse as a challenge for

rod and reel. Thus of the Pioneer: "Various clear streams resembling so many English trout streams contribute to its source..... Within six miles of the sea the river runs between bold cliffs of rock from the summit of which one can look down and see the fish"."

E.S. Rawson must rate as a "barra" pioneer, although in another memorable catch Kennedy again took major honours. The pair were together, when "after a fight which brought the banks of the Spey to the eyes of the spectator, the latter landed an 8½ lb. Palmer".<sup>21</sup>

However pioneering the valley was not always so idyllic and in those years on Pioneer Estate the going was rough.

- 1. Memoirs of Sir Robert Philp K.C.M.G. by H.C. Perry.
- 2. Keeley's Golden Fleece (later Northey's Oriental) stood near the corner of North (now River) and Wood Streets. It was virtually Mackay's civic centre. Governor Sir George Bowen and the Hon. John Douglas were tendered an official dinner there on 13th October 1865, with T.H. Fitzgerald in the chair. W.O. Hodgkinson and partners printed the first copy of the *Mackay Mercury and South Kennedy Advertiser* there in April 1866. A roof-top light served as a navigational beacon.
- 3. A.J.S. Bank records. D.M. 21-9-1931.
- 4. D.M. Jubilee Issue 1912 p 52.
- 5. Ling Roth called the first house a grass humpy.
- 6. Four Years in Queensland, by E.B. Kennedy.
- 7. Quote by courtesy Q.S.A.
- 8. Details by courtesy Q.S.A.
- 9. Branscombe and Fitzgerald. Details by courtesy Q.S.A.
- 10. Figures by courtesy Q.S.A.
- 11. Port Mackay by Ling Roth.
- 12. Port Mackay by Ling Roth.
- 13. Muller's diary, D.M. 16-2-1932; Muller's grandson, G.E. Muller became chairman of Racecourse Mill and of Pioneer Shire and was a prominent public figure.
- 14. Ward is mentioned in O.S.A. records; Altereith, M.M. 27-2-1867.
- 15. Four Years in Oueensland, by E.B. Kennedy.
- 16. D.M. Jubilee Issue. John Rolleston arrived Mackay 1872.
- 17. Four Years in Queensland by E.B. Kennedy.
- 18. E.S. Rawson in British Australian reprinted M.M. 1901.
- 19. Meadowlands (south side) first crushed 1870. Alexandra, Pleystowe and Cassada (south side) and Pioneer on the North Side were the only other mills operating that year.
- 20. Four Years in Queensland by E.B. Kennedy.
- 21. M.M. October 1870.

#### Part four

# PIONEER MILL

Sugar plantings were big news in the Brisbane Press but in the sugar section of the *Brisbane Courier*'s agricultural notes of 16th December 1865, Mackay does not rate a mention. The omission is understandable. Spiller and Fitzgerald had but a patch of cane each, the same as most other farmers had in the colony, by no means on the scale of Louis Hope, Francis Bigge or T.O. Keating of the Maryborough Sugar Co. Spiller progressed slowly. Before erecting his wooden rollers he had been unsuccessful in the South, trying to raise money for a steam mill. This could well have been the trip he sold his plough to help finance.

Fitzgerald's affairs moved faster. A 25-year-old Scot, John Ewen Davidson, arrived at Mackay on 12th September 1865 and was impressed with the work of both Fitzgerald and Spiller.<sup>2</sup>

However he was more impressed with the potential of Rockingham Bay where the town of Cardwell had been established in July 1864.<sup>3</sup>

No doubt he was influenced by reports from Cardwell's great champion, George Elphinstone Dalrymple and by a report on the north being prepared by Walter Hill, which the Brisbane "sugar club" certainly knew of.

There Davidson had about 40 acres ploughed in July 1866 and a good crop was coming by Christmas. Some of it grew from plants sent from Mackay. The enterprise was wrecked by floods and wet weather in December and January. Davidson returned to Mackay on 8th February 1867 and bought a half share in the Alexandra from Fitzgerald. On 27th March he met John Dow, a Scottish engineer, formerly from St. Kitts in the West Indies and on 7th October he recorded that he had "marked out the site for the works", i.e. Alexandra mill. The partnership had moved quickly, as already young shoots were coming well at Alexandra. Six other estates on the Pioneer then had only 160 acres planted among them.

In May 1868 the schooner *Pacific* from Sydney, via Broadsound, landed the first machinery for Alexandra and more came in July. The latter portion of this "immense and weighty cargo" — 80 tons — was unloaded by the crew of five in nine six-hour days, the customs regulations having prohibited further time for unloading.<sup>5</sup>

Cane cutting began at Alexandra on 14th September 1868 and the first crushing finished on 18th November, with 230 tons of sugar made.

The early planters were proud of their best sugars. Davidson showed the *Mackay Mercury* one of his early samples: "White glistening colour, small grained, of excellent flavour."

It was important to know which type of sugar a mill, and a cane variety, could produce. Straw coloured crystals were best for Melbourne where refineries captured the refined sugar market. Local sugars sold better in Brisbane than in the South as there were no refined whites to compete against. The lower grade (darker) sugars also had their place on the Brisbane market.

In the Christmas-New Year period of 1868-69 the *Mercury* reported a sample, from the Ribbon variety, "a few acres having been planted by Mr. Spiller, who by a very primitive piece of mechanism, crushed some of the canes as they arrived at maturity. Competent judges said that if sold in the colonies it would realise an excellent price".

Spiller steadily developed Pioneer and Branscombe while his cane plant supply, and more importantly his reserve of capital, built up. Maize and cotton were his mainstay. In October 1868 the outward manifest of the *Black Swan* (Capt. Saunders) showed "twelve bales of cotton, ginned by John Spiller"; and he left with that cargo for Sydney to buy a new mill.\*

Again he was unable to raise the capital. He made only eight tons of sugar in 1869, but planted 75 acres of cane that year to give him 221 acres for 1870. He therefore had 146 acres planted in or before 1869. What he did with it all is not clear but local belief is that he forded cane across the Pioneer River to Pleystowe before his "big" mill was built. Drays later hauled molasses in tanks across the Pioneer to the distillery at Te Kowai.

Another sample of the 1869 product from Ribbon ratoons was on display in town. The *Mercury* said: "The machinery employed is of a most primitive description, being principally of wood, made on the place as an experiment". The sample was "a rich, bright amber colour with a large coarse grain". Manufacture was supervised by John Altereith, "with experience in Java". Worked by one horse, the plant could make one and a half tons of sugar a week. Altereith and Percy Crees were his key-men at this period."

His security was developing and on 29th April 1870 he transferred Branscombe to Maurice Lyons of Brisbane. Events of 1870–71 show his capital accumulation was still slow but in 1871 he ordered a "big" new mill which was finally not ready until mid-October, too late to handle his 221 acres on its own. <sup>10</sup>

Accordingly he made a deal with James and Robert Donaldson at their small plantation named Cassada on Bakers Creek. They had an iron horse-mill from Smellie and Co., Brisbane which made 14 tons of sugar from seven acres in 1870. They then decided to buy a steam plant and Spiller acquired the horse-mill to help his own primitive mill make a start on the 1871 crop. If he is accorded the technical honour of having erected the district's first primitive single crushing plant in 1867, then technically he had the district's first double crusher, both units horse drawn.

The big mill placed Spiller in the local big league of planters and with Davidson and Fitzgerald at Alexandra and Fitzgerald at Meadowlands, he decided to test the Melbourne market. No Mackay sugar had so far gone direct to Victoria, partly because of the need to ship large amounts and also because of a £3 a ton import duty imposed by the Victorian Government. They sent 10 tons (Meadowlands 723 mats, Pioneer 729 and Alexandra 305). It realised £37 a ton. The venture led other planters to supply what seemed to be a more ready market at better prices.

The Mackay planters chafed at the Victorian import duty. As an issue it ranked not far below "a fair go for the north", which argument Fitzgerald plugged consistently in the Colonial Assembly. Victorian and Queensland interests were to remain at odds on sugar matters for the next 70 years except when Victorian Protectionist policies gave the northern sugar men uneasy allies.

In the 1870's an air of excitement pervaded the Pioneer Valley not unlike that common to a new mineral field. Mackay moved out of the depot port stage as the

district generated its own commercial activity. Planters bought or chartered vessels for Melanesian recruiting. In March 1873 a group of the port's largest importers bought the top sail schooner *Agnes* (80 tons capacity) to work their own Mackay-Brisbane run. Outside capital poured in with what was described in retrospect as "reckless prodigality".<sup>12</sup>

The 1872 season saw 1,857 acres of cane harvested in the district and 2,500 tons of sugar made — more than in any other district in the colony. With his new mill at Pioneer, Spiller was now in the van of district progress. In the next eight years he would outstrip the field.

<sup>1.</sup> A.G. Muller's Pioneer's Diary, D.M. 16-2-1932.

<sup>2.</sup> Davidson's Journal, courtesy O.H.S.

<sup>3.</sup> See History of Cardwell Shire, by Dorothy Jones and Frontiersman, by Jean Farnfield.

<sup>4.</sup> History of Cardwell Shire; Davidson's Journal; M.M. 20-2-1867; 5-10-1867 and 14-9-1867.

<sup>5.</sup> Recalled M.M. 24-12-1892.

<sup>6.</sup> M.M. 16-9-1868; 230 tons was given by Fitzgerald's grandson and used by C.H. O'Brien in *History of the Sugar Industry*, A.S.J. July 1951. Another figure given is 110 but a breakdown of technical details of the first crushing favours 230; discussed D.M. Sugar Centenary Issue 31-7-1967 p.8.

<sup>7.</sup> M.M. 23-9-1868.

<sup>8.</sup> M.M. 14-10-1868.

<sup>9.</sup> M.M. 5-12 1870; molasses detail M.M. 11-4 1874.

Branscombe detail courtesy Q.S.A.; Pioneer Mill starting date 19-10-1871 documented by J. Kerr P.P. p 43.

<sup>11.</sup> M.M. 8-10-1870; 10-12-1870.

<sup>12.</sup> D.M. review 19-7-1912.

#### Part five

## **NEW PIONEER**

For several years Spiller kept off his scrub-lands. Apart from their relative inaccessibility, a reason may be pinpointed by a writer signing himself "Jethro Tull" in *The Queenslander* of May and June 1883.

The scrub-covered hills on the North Side, he wrote, were different to the scrub country of the Clarence or the Logan, or the Mary or the Burnett Rivers, where vegetation appeared lush and more "tropical" than in the tropical North Side scrubs. Nor did North Side vegetation achieve the jungle proportions of the Cardwell area. Its foliage was hard and shiny, unlike the softer textured leaves found in the scrubs of both North and South. North Side lands, he wrote, were of granitic origin with a high proportion of sandstone. Volcanic additions gave the relatively infertile granite a peculiar fertility which remained highest on the hillsides and declined when the soil was washed down to the flats.

Plantings on the high slopes did in fact ratoon more crops than stands farther down, but, to begin with, the scrublands were considered unsuited to cane. When Edward Denman came to J.E. Paine's Dulverton among the North Side hills in 1872 he disagreed. In the expansion of plantings in the early seventies, which saw Dulverton (later Miclere), The Cedars, Inverness and Richmond established in the hill country the *Mercury* commented: "The proposition that the North Side high country is not suitable for cane does not seem to have cropped up yet."

Edward Denman told a meeting at Hill End in 1902 that it was said at first the high land was not suitable for cane and then that the cane it grew was not suitable for sugar, "It not only made sugar", he said, "but made open pan sugar which sold for £2/10/- a ton more than the vacuum pan sugar made from the river flats."

Spiller however had ample river and forest flat for expansion and expand he did. New Pioneer, as his big mill was called, was one of the best mills of the early seventies. He persevered with his Ribbon cane and planted Black Java in part replacement of Bourbon, the colony's chief variety.<sup>3</sup>

Black Java was gaining favour. William Hyne at Balmoral on the south side planned to replace all his Bourbon with it. In 1874, four acres yielded almost three tons of sugar per acre at Balmoral, almost double the Bourbon yield. It was a smaller plant than Bourbon and with its greater sugar content, more profitably handled.<sup>4</sup>

Ribbon took longer to mature than the others but it was sweeter and made a durable type of sugar. Spiller sent some of his sugar down the river in scows or punts. These were propelled by long sweeps, operated by islanders who walked up and down the full length of the scow while working the sweep.<sup>5</sup>

Five tons of Ribbon worth about £124 sank at "the Rocks" on one occasion and was submerged for 12 hours, but three tons were saved. Bourbon sugar would have been "converted to molasses".

"We are glad to learn that Mr. Spiller's Ribbon cane is turning out exceedingly

well", enthused the *Mercury*, during the 1874 crushing; "..... density never less than 10 Baume". Pioneer had 70 acres of the variety for 1874 and it recorded the highest district sugar yield, "3½ tons of dry sugar (per acre) of a most superior quality". The paper urged others to plant Ribbon and in the same issue remarked that it was a wet winter with July rainfall the heaviest since 1868.

The two items were more closely related than the editor or his readers realised for wet weather triggered a disastrous rust outbreak a year later and Bourbon was the worst hit. Rust gave the district its first setback after a run of good seasons. Never since, in fact, has the sugar industry at Mackay enjoyed a decade of such satisfactory weather as its first.

Rain in 1874 reduced sugar content but gave the 1875 crop a good start. In February 1875 rain and gales struck south of Bowen. The coastal vessel *Tinonee* had a rough time out of Bowen. The *Leichhardt* left Bowen on a Thursday night and returned next morning to signal that the *Gothenberg*, trading between Bowen and South Australia was wrecked. Many prominent South Australians lost their lives in that shipwreck.<sup>7</sup>

In six days in April, 28 inches of rain swelled the Pioneer higher than record levels of February 1864. More rain in May brought the 1875 total to 100 inches. Then a "serious calamity" threatened. The canefields began to appear as though they had been badly frostbitten.<sup>8</sup>

This was rust, a withering disease which had appeared in Maryborough in 1870. As in the South, it appeared worst in dry and sandy soils, particularly after wet and cold spells. Bourbon, the district's mainstay, was first and worst affected. The whole planter population joined in a spontaneous district effort to beat the crisis. J.E. Davidson and Louis Duval, an experienced Mauritius sugarman, classified varieties on the basis of rust resistance, collected a mass of detail on growing conditions and finally recommended the best varieties to plant.

A Board of Inquiry into the disease had been set up in February 1875, that is, before the Mackay outbreak. It was of little immediate value to the planters and the *Mercury* treated its representatives who visited Mackay to unusually severe criticism: "We cannot compliment these gentlemen on the practical value of their enquiries. In . . . . . 19 months . . . . . . the planters have made their own remedies".

The Board held 15 meetings which cost £333 and both Davidson and Spiller saw sufficient value in its existence to become corresponding members. Davidson listed 17 canes in order of resistance. Spiller's Ribbon ranked fifth and Black Java thirteenth. Rose Bamboo and Meerah ranked first and second respectively but for practical plantation results Davidson recommended Otaheite, Gingham and Rose Bamboo. The planters finally took a risk on Black Java and it, Rose Bamboo and Meerah became the chief varieties.9

Of Malabar (listed fourth of the 17) Davidson quoted Louis Bouton, an expert retained by the Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture, as saying it would be better to abandon its cultivation. Fifty years later another generation of Mackay millers was to wish the local industry had done so. Rust reduced the 1875 output from an estimated 7,000 tons of sugar to 2,500. The loss to the district was put at £80,000.<sup>10</sup>

Spiller emerged from the crisis better than most. His crop failures were lighter than many and for those who had cane to crush the year proved better than expected, for Mackay was by this time supplying such a significant share of the Australian market that a temporary scarcity in the South pushed prices up.

Fitzgerald, who had added Meadowlands and Te Kowai to his Alexandra interests and was ready to build a mill at Peri, was the outstanding casualty. He had moved too far too fast. He quietly left Mackay early in 1876 and his insolvency was advertised on 4th November of that year.<sup>11</sup>

The Robinson brothers of the Lorne were also declared insolvent but more important than the individual insolvencies was the great rearrangement of management which took place on the plantations as the industry's largest creditors, notably Wm. Sloane and Co. and the A.J.S. Bank took over their sugar assets.

Rust losses were aggravated by labour problems. Labour had begun to drain off to the Palmer gold field in late 1873 and Spiller chartered the *Mary Stuart* to recruit Islanders.<sup>12</sup>

Then influenza ravaged the Islander work force. Forty "boys" were reported sick on one North Side plantation. This could have been either Pioneer, River Estate or Foulden. Then a measles epidemic killed 58 Islanders in two months. Again the North Side was worst hit. Deaths reported were: Foulden 20, River Estate 18, Pioneer 5, The Cedars 5, other plantations 10.<sup>13</sup>

The 1875 crushing at Pioneer came to a halt as Spiller's whole work force of more than 100 was laid up, so he brought 40 Chinese from Cooktown to enable him to resume crushing. They arrived in the *Florence Irving* in mid-November, "a sturdy lot", with no English and accompanied by a serang or overseer.

Spiller discharged them after two months declaring them lazy and dishonest. Their presence in the town for some days after leaving Pioneer irked residents and then they left to join their countrymen on the diggings at Clermont and Copperfield.<sup>15</sup>

Community over-reaction against Chinese was greater than against the Melanesian presence. At Branscombe a Kanaka died. Dr. Robert McBurney diagnosed dysentery and ordered his burial. The *Brishane Courier*, ever ready to push an anti-Chinese line, printed a highly imaginative allegation from a Mackay correspondent that the Islander had been killed by a Chinese cook.<sup>16</sup>

Mercury columnist "Paul Pry" put the incident in perspective thus: "There has been as much fuss over the Kanaka affair, as if the Chinaman had been suspected of killing a real live newspaper correspondent, which by the way is not improbable, as some of his race will do so shortly if they are maligned in this reckless manner".

In spite of a second rust scare in 1876 Spiller fared better than most that season. In 1874 he had begun to improve his sugar recovery process. By late 1876 prices had firmed beyond pre-season forecasts and his newer technique allowed him to make the best of the better prices. He displayed in town "the best sample of sugar ever to have come from Pioneer . . . . . straw coloured . . . . . large sparkling grain worth not less than £36 a ton on the colonial market". The sugar industry surely lost some of its drama when sugar chemists became less extrovert and ceased sharing their triumphs with the general public.<sup>17</sup>

About this period Ole Matsen earned Spiller's praise for his work at the Pioneer cane carrier. Matsen, a "new chum" from Denmark, worked for R.D. Dunne at Nebia in 1872 and then went to Pioneer. Dunne wrote of him: "In the early days when Kanaka labour was employed (the job) required tact, determination and a sound method of workmanship to regulate the feed on the carrier and marshal the numerous drayloads of cane — with Kanaka drivers — in proper order and convenient positions.

Mr. Spiller told me he never expected to get a man over the carrier as competent, willing and trustworthy". 18

Mackay district took the rest of the decade to recover fully from the bad years of 1875 and 1876 but by 1877 Spiller was planning to upgrade his new mill further and to expand greatly his North Side enterprise.

Footnote on Rust: Angus Mackay, author of *The Sugar Cane in Australia* wrote in 1883 that Dr. Joseph Bancroft and the Board of Inquiry established that "rust" was caused by a minute insect. Decades later Mr. C.G. Hughes, well known as chief pathologist with the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations classed "rust in the 1870's" as Downey Mildew (Sclerospora Sachohari). Mr. Brian Egan of the Bureau noted that a rust of sugar cane was recognised in Australia by Cobb (1893). North found it still present in 1915 but causing little loss. Under Queensland conditions transmission of rust disease Puccinia Kuehnii occurred in hot, humid weather in summer and warm to cool, humid periods in autumn.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> Jethro Tull was a Berkshire landowner who greatly improved British agriculture in the nineteenth century.

<sup>2.</sup> M.M. 12-4-1873 and 16-1-1902.

<sup>3.</sup> According to the *Louisianu Planter* Bourbon was distributed commercially from Bourbon Island (Reunion) but had come from the Malabar Coast. Otaheite canes were often confused with it and the two were thought to have had a common origin. Bourbon did not pass out of world wide use until after 1906.

<sup>4.</sup> M.M. 29 8-1874.

<sup>5.</sup> Described by R.A.S. Brown D.M. 18-12-1933. Mr. Brown's father was Post and Telegraph Master and later Postmaster in the 1870's.

<sup>6.</sup> M.M. 11-7-1874.

<sup>7.</sup> M.M. 25-2-1875.

<sup>8.</sup> Significant news items began M.M. 13-6-1875 and 26-6-1875 and the story ran for the rest of the year.

<sup>9.</sup> M.M. 6-7-1876.

<sup>10.</sup> A comparative loss of tons in the mid-1970's would have cost about \$40m.

<sup>11.</sup> Peri never crushed.

<sup>12.</sup> M.M. 21-2-1874.

<sup>13.</sup> M.M. 2-10-1875.

<sup>14.</sup> M.M. 13-11-1875.

<sup>15.</sup> M.M. 5-1-1876.

<sup>16.</sup> M.M. 17-2-1877.

<sup>17.</sup> M.M. 26-8-1876.

<sup>18.</sup> D.M. 11-1-1924.

<sup>19.</sup> B.S.E.S. details by courtesy Mr. C.G. Story.

#### Part six

# **SUCCESS**

Rewarding prices, benign seasons and steady expansion made the late sixties and early seventies a profitable period at Port Mackay. "There was money to be made in those years", J.E. Davidson told a farewell gathering when he left Mackay in 1900. Rust halted the inrush of capital and except for one brief spell in the early eighties, the local sugar industry was never again to see an inrush of outside capital on such a large proportional scale.

Successive generations of commentators have castigated southern interests, particularly Wm. Sloane and Co. and the A.J.S. Bank for withdrawing support on the scale they did. Capital investment from outside did not resume until 1879 and then it was only a trickle. The lesson of the rust crisis became apparent almost immediately. "The outbreak checked indiscriminate raising of funds and lending", said the *Mercury* on 4th November 1876.

There were in fact, fewer insolvencies than recorded memories of the period tend to indicate, with Lorne the only Mackay plantation with a mill to close and Peri not starting. The *Mercury* complimented "some mercantile firms on the liberality of their treatment as mortgagees".

"It is a matter of public notoriety", one editorial stated, "that an important mercantile firm which may justly be considered the backbone and financial marrow of the sugar industry in Mackay district, has acted with commendable liberality in making to its constituents, such rebates of principle and interest, that the burdens which appeared altogether too great to be borne are now comparatively light. Properties which were offered for sale at considerably less than actual cost for the mortgagees, are withdrawn from sale excepting upon much more satisfactory terms to the vendors".

In the changed economic pattern John Spiller emerged as a long term beneficiary. Reduced European beet supplies and partial failure of the 1876–77 West Indies cane crop improved local prospects, but more particularly, Spiller's steady consolidation had placed him in a good position to capitalise on the ownership exchanges which occurred as creditors took over the receiving of their plantations.

On the south side Wm. Sloane and Co. took over T.H. Fitzgerald's assets at Te Kowai and Peri; the A.J.S. Bank relieved him of Meadowlands. On the North Side the most significant change was the take-over by the A.J.S. Bank of River Estate from the Long Brothers.

Edward Maitland Long became one of Mackay districts hardiest survivors. Though his plantation and milling enterprises appeared to slip away from him — Branscombe, River Estate, Habana and finally Pleystowe Central Mill — he rolled with the economic punches and remained a prominent figure in local affairs. He extended his business base well outside the plantation range and must rank among the district's ablest mobilisers of local capital.

The A.J.S. Bank took over River Estate in 1876. Since E.M. Long retained

sufficient financial strength to build one of the district's finest mills at Habana a few years later, it is fair to say that at the worst he cut his losses. Whatever those losses were they were Spiller's gain.

A youthful Henry Brandon managed the A.J.S. Bank branch at Mackay. Spiller was heavily committed to the bank but having survived the rust crisis, possessed of a wide range of soil types and with ample room to expand, Pioneer Estate was a better banker's risk at that time than most plantations.

The forecast shortages of beet and cane sugar kept the market firm and though investors were wary of Mackay enterprises for the remainder of the decade prices for good quality sugar continued to "make". It was a good time to gain entry into an established plantation.

Spiller was appointed manager in mid 1876 and as related earlier was manager at the time of the testimonial dinner to C.B. de Lissa in December 1877, but later Percy Crees occupied the position. In 1878 Spiller and Brandon were owners in partnership and Spiller began buying up adjacent holdings.

Meanwhile Pioneer had become a show place. The rust experience had emphasised the need for greater efficiency in the mills as well as in the fields. Measures taken and results obtained varied among estates. Costs of production on several well run estates in the later seventies approximated £8/10/- a ton of sugar but one had reduced this figure to £2. $^{2}$ 

By mid 1877 Spiller's New Pioneer was "one of the largest and most complete plant in the district", on an estate "of which the extent and excellence is unrivalled".

Spiller had 800 acres under cultivation with 500 acres of cane for 1877. Varieties were Malabar, Gingham, Big Yellow, Caledonian, Ribbon and a promising new import from Reva River in Fiji, Otaheiti. He still had only a few acres of scrubland under cane. He viewed the destruction of certain creek scrubs (along Fursden Creek) as akin to vandalism. His forest soils varied from rich chocolate loams to reclaimed ti-tree swamp.

Cultivation was meticulous, even at the price of higher labour costs. One field for instance, of 12 acres, was given a first ploughing of 11 inches, followed by a subsoil plough which trenched the ground to 18 inches. His white labour proportion of employees was high — 30 to 40 Europeans to 130 to 140 Islanders.

The mill had a single pair of 4 ft. 6 in. rollers 2 ft. in diameter, from Mirlees, Tait and Watson, supplied with cane from a self acting carrier. Earlier the rollers had been hand fed. Rollers and carrier were driven by a 24 h.p. engine. Steam came from two "large" multitubular boilers and one Cornish flue boiler.

There were five clarifiers and four 36 in. fugals (which separated sugar and molasses) with two more planned. Two Wetzel pans (in which juice was boiled at atmospheric pressure) were being used but there was also a large (7 ft. diameter) vacuum pan able to turn out 10 tons of sugar a day. This was one of the earlier pans in the district. Reduced internal pressure allowed juice to boil at lower temperatures than sea level boiling point. A 12 h.p. steam engine powered the suction pump which reduced the pressure.

An 8 h.p. engine and double acting pump supplied the boilers and also the mill's water requirements. (At this time maceration, i.e. introduction of water on crushed megass to extract extra sugar, was not used). The teache battery (containing syrups) and a montejus (an important labour saver) raised the syrup from the teaches to the

subsiders. Robertson and Co. of the Victoria Foundry, Mackay were then putting in new plate iron subsiders.

The mill was considered the equal of any mill in the district although Te Kowai had a slightly larger plant. In 1878 Te Kowai made 1,080 tons of sugar, Pioneer 943 and River Estate 866. The Alexandra then a veteran of 10 seasons made 390 tons. With the mill, residences, carpenters' and smiths' shops, stables and megass sheds (no megass carrier yet and the fibres had to be collected, dried and stored) as well as housing for up to 180 Islanders and Europeans, Pioneer was a sizable little community.<sup>4</sup>

Spiller continued to break new ground. He made Mackay's first brewers' crystals and exhibited some in the 1877 Brisbane Exhibition. At Mackay they were considered of "good, hard grain, well comparable to Mauritius". Then as the decade drew to a close and sugar business improved he achieved two more "firsts" for Mackay.

John Spiller's first loco, 1879. Photo: J.H. Mills.



The arrival of his new tramway in mid-1879 on *Silvery Wave* has already been mentioned — machinery and rails for Spiller's two mills on River and Pioneer Estates. This included two of the largest boilers ever brought to Mackay — 20 ft. by 6 ft. 4 in. Spiller announced that the tramway rolling stock would be hauled by "a steam trolley or engine", to be made at Mackay by Robertson and Co.'s Victoria Foundry.

Spiller's (and Mackay's) first cane loco was delivered from the foundry in the last week in May 1880. About the same time a complimentary dinner was accorded John and Mrs. Spiller on the eve of their departure for Europe. One of the speakers was George Smith, local commission agent, pioneer of sugar mills and a shipping line, and friend and colleague of Spiller.<sup>6</sup>

Late in August 1880 the Spillers were in Devonshire and the old pioneer, Thomas Henry Fitzgerald was on a return visit to Pioneer Estate.<sup>7</sup>

The mill was making up to 68 tons of sugar a week and had just established a district record for the amount of juice handled by the clarifiers; 900 acres were now under cultivation.

Percy Crees (manager in Spiller's absence) arranged a loco ride for a party of visitors. Fitzgerald, Crees and engineer Henry Braby and several ladies made themselves as comfortable as they could on tram trucks padded with chaff sacks. The *Mercury* reported: "A little distance from the manager's house and close to the mill is the terminus. The first part of the line is a sharp curve leading to a decline, at the bottom of which is a viaduct of wood, in some places 20 ft. high. At the top of a stiff incline a cutting extended for several hundred yards. The line then ran straight for a while and came to a halt at a swamp. Here the loco needed a drink and was replenished by bucket. The return trip was made with loaded tram trucks in tow".

In October, Spiller was in London and ready to leave for Glasgow "to obtain machinery of the very latest construction and with the newest improvements". He also planned to recruit in Ireland, farm labourers, whom he expected to bring back with him when he returned about April 1881.8

The new plant included a 5½ in. cylinder 3 ft. 6 in. gauge locomotive by John Fowler of Leeds, capable of hauling 80 tons on the level and 15 tons at 15 m.p.h. up a one in 40 grade. This was for use on River Estate where already three and a half miles of 3 ft. 6 in. track ran the whole length of the plantation. Two extra miles of permanent way and a mile of portable lines were ordered. Henry Braby had supervised the line construction and had placed it so that loaded cane wagons ran alongside the mill carrier. The placement seems the only obvious one today but it won praise for the system at the time. There were 26 wagons of 23 cwt. capacity; 16 of these arrived with the Fowler loco. A Grammie Electric Light apparatus was installed at River Estate and a Semi Automatic Gas machine ordered for Pioneer.

By the end of July 1881 the new tramway system was ready and a "christening" for the big new loco planned. John Spiller was ill in Tasmania at the time so Henry Brandon announced that he would act for him. About 70 people attended and Mrs. Brandon named the loco "Emma Ruth" after Mrs. Spiller. Darkness brought a happy afternoon to an end and the visitors were able to go through the mill on their return and to enthuse over the new lighting system."

While overseas Spiller ordered machinery for his third mill. He had decided to exploit the potential of the North Side hill scrubs and ordered a 2,000 ton mill to be erected on Ashburton Estate, adjoining Pioneer. Pioneer now had four miles of



John Spiller's first tramway, Pioneer Estate 1879. Photo: J.H. Mills, courtesy A.S.P.A.

railway and a similar track was planned to link the two mills. Among the recent new plant was a stump pulling machine which was immediately put to work clearing 600 acres for the new mill.

Pioneer Estate now comprised 4,886 acres; 1,100 tons of sugar were expected in 1881. River Estate had 2,625 acres and expected 1,250 tons of sugar. Scattered blocks of many hundreds of acres in what Pioneer families called Ashburton country bear Spiller's name in an early map.<sup>10</sup>

About one fifth of the Mackay sugar make now came from Spiller's mills. He was a very substantial planter and soon was to become more so.

<sup>1.</sup> M.M. 11-11-1876.

<sup>2.</sup> Probably Wm. Hyne who was renowned for efficiency.

<sup>3.</sup> M.M. 2-6-1877.

<sup>4.</sup> M.M. 2-6-1877.

<sup>5.</sup> M.M. 7-6-1879.

<sup>6.</sup> Began the Queensland Steamship Company; director Bowen Sugar Co. up to 1868-69; arrived Mackay 1869; foundation partner of original Marian mill which was named after his daughter; believed to have initially influenced C.S.R. Co. to come to Mackay; his daughter Leila married C.S.R. Homebush mill manager Robert Gemmell-Smith; arrangements with McIlwraith McEachern's London office to finance mill near Sandy Creek terminated by end of early eighties boom; Mackay secretary of Northern Separation League; died 1890.

<sup>7.</sup> M.M. 20-8-80.

<sup>8.</sup> M.M. 20-10-80.

<sup>9.</sup> M.M. 3-8-81.

<sup>10.</sup> Q.S.A. J5/2 Bassett (1914).

#### Part seven

# **FORTUNE**

Spiller's stature as a public figure increased greatly in the later years of the 16½ he spent at Mackay. He lacked the refined accomplishments of J.E. Davidson who was at once a trained naturalist, amateur astronomer, agricultural technologist, competent club cricketer and accomplished pianist.

Spiller's agricultural technology was unquestionably sound but his demeanour, though typically that of an English country gentleman was more earthy than Davidson's. His involvement in local affairs was frequently at a level of grass roots disputation; Davidson's, except where such emotive issues as Kanaka labour and northern separation were concerned, tended to affect an almost scientific detachment. Thus in 1878 when the question of small mills and central mills for local farmers was under discussion, J.E. Davidson observed "an ounce of fact is worth a pound of theory", and advocated trial of a small Victor Mill on a 10 acre plot of cane, even though he did not believe small mills could survive.

A year earlier, the Mackay Central Sugar Manufacturing Company had been planned by a group of business men and farmers led by C.R. Dutaillis. The provisional directors were: C.R. Dutaillis, Jas. Ready, J.W. Cowley, D. McGregor, H. Josling, A.L. Smith, A. Florence, J. Porter, P. McKenny, J.W. Cran, D. Ross and W. Logie.<sup>2</sup>

When they struck trouble, Spiller made an offer: "If the storekeepers' Central Mill is not ready, River Estate Mill has been offered to them . . . . . and if they do not like to grow cane induce them to grow maize, rice, coffee, etc".

Spiller made this offer public in a letter replying to Press criticism that planters were restricting support for local business men by direct dealings with the South. Local traders were disappointed that outside capital was still not flowing into Mackay (i.e. in the harvest season of 1879) in spite of improving sugar prospects. Spiller chided the *Mercury*: "There are as fine prospects now and far more certain than when I first saw the Pioneer, and it only needs the right sort of man and your journal, as of old, to guide them".

He did in fact contribute weightily to district prosperity apart from his share of sugar production. The district make in 1878 was 6,882 tons of raw sugar worth in the order of £175,000. Spiller paid Europeans £3,214 in wages and £4,560 to local firms plus Kanaka wages of some £2,500 to £3,000, "which is paid when due and deposited where it should be, either in the savings bank or in the hands of storekeepers. I have a goodly number of Kanakas, Mr. Editor and it takes something to keep their pot boiling. I can muster a fair crowd of white men". He had then 86.

Spiller believed the potential of the district for sugar to have been almost limitless. In October 1877 he told the Mackay District Association the district could yield 600,000 tons of sugar. At this meeting Charles Rawson first suggested a Mackay Show Association. D.H. Dalrymple suggested a small Mackay exhibit at the great Paris Exhibition of 1878. Both suggestions were acted on. For the Paris exhibit a sub-

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committee comprising A.R. McKenzie, J. Spiller, Geo Smith, W.H. Paxton, D.H. Dalrymple and Wal. Marsh was appointed. Wm. Hyne and Hugh McCready promised active support.

Spiller had earlier defended the district against a Mr. G. Clarence who wrote in the Fiji *Times* that Queensland pessimism following the rust crisis meant five of the colony's mills would soon shift to Fiji. Clarence had lived at Pioneer for six months in 1876 during which time he had appeared to arrive at an opposite conclusion.

He even wrote a letter to Spiller stating a belief that Mackay's only disability was a lack of reliable labour and that 2,000 tons of sugar could be made on an average Mackay plantation more cheaply than anywhere else in the world. The Mackay planters liked this approach from someone with a penchant for writing letters in the Empire Press as it helped their case against opponents of the use of island labour on Queensland plantations. Spiller declared the Fiji *Times* article to be nonsense and published Clarence's own words in refutation.

As shown by his River Estate offer to the "storekeepers", he was a district champion in deed as well as word. District advancement, he reasoned, could only advance his own security. Thus his mills were always ready to take cane from wherever it offered. Generally plantation crops tended to fall behind mill capacity; but in the years when planters' mills were pressed to handle their own crops, small farmers faced serious losses not only from lack of crushing facilities, but also from having to accept treatment of their crop when sugar content was beyond its peak. These and related questions of a fair cane price led to moves for grower owned central mills as early as 1872.

Spiller and William Hyne of Balmoral (the only mill built within the town limits) served farmers fairly in this regard. Davidson also crushed outside cane, almost from the beginning, but the "big company" type of organisation which followed the formation of the Melbourne Mackay Sugar Company after Davidson merged with Wm. Sloane and Co., tended to cause more friction than the person to person approach of Spiller and Hyne.<sup>4</sup>

Spiller crushed Richmond cane for Cumming and McCready, Glenalbyn cane for McBryde and Finlayson and cane for Patrick Ryan (an old employee) and James Wales, among others on the North Side. When Meadowlands had too much cane for

its mill Spiller hauled that across the river and crushed it too.5

He would give a quote for a crop on sight. The first crop Edward Denman sold at Mackay was to Spiller for £1,000 in the field. This was several seasons after Pioneer's steel mill was built and when other planters were paying by weight or juice gallonage. "Mr. Spiller told me the crop paid him handsomely", Denman said.<sup>6</sup>

Spiller was not an academic naturalist but he had a feel for the soil and a love of the countryside. On River Estate he broke away from the practice of retaining trash on ratoons after harvest. He told his field overseer, Donald McDonald, to burn half and retain half. The ratoons came away best on the burned section and responded more effectively to cultivation.<sup>7</sup>

His successful experiments with Dr. Icery's sulphurous acid process of sugar recovery earned the district a great deal of money. Ordinarily lime was added to cane juice to stop the sugar changing to irrecoverable "grape" sugar. The mixture settled in subsiders and impurities were removed as filter press. The juice was then boiled under reduced pressures and therefore at low boiling points, in effets. Similar low pressure

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applied in the vacuum pan where sugar crystals formed in the syrupy mass. Molasses was then spun out in the fugals.

Ordinary liming resulted in a molasses removal of about 30 gallons for each ton of sugar. Icery's process provided for the introduction of sulphurous acid to the juice and then the addition of critical amounts of bisulphite and monosulphite of lime before adding lime for defecation in the normal manner.<sup>8</sup>

A somewhat dejected C.B. de Lissa arrived at Mackay hoping to interest local planters in the process after southern plantations had rejected his requests for a trial. De Lissa was promoting the process virtually as a means of making white sugars without a refinery, but Spiller realised that even if it only meant a better output of raws and reduced the losses of recoverable sugar in molasses it was worth a try.

Roberston's Helenvale mill on the Coomera River had used the process successfully but de Lissa ran into severe opposition in the South, particularly on plantations where the National Bank was involved. Spiller decided to give him a free hand at River Estate. De Lissa later extended special thanks to J.M. Costello and Donald McDonald, two of Spiller's key men, for their help.

The experiments were successful and Spiller ordered new plant for both his mills. Brisbane agents were John Hart and Co., Louis Duval, manager of Nebia in 1877, was their Mackay agent. Meadowlands and Balmoral followed suit and the general manager of the A.J.S. Bank told Mackay planters the process was finally being adopted in the South. Spiller sponsored a banquet to de Lissa "in recognition of the valuable services he had rendered the district".9

In a "neat speech" de Lissa proposed a toast to John Spiller and Henry Brandon which brought cheers from the gathering. Brandon said the process increased the market value of sugar by £4 a ton. From the residue, 23 gallons of golden syrup per ton of sugar made was recovered. "We consider this marvellous", he said.

Spiller also introduced Cail and Co.'s centrifugals to Mackay. Little known in Queensland, these were common in Mauritius, Demerara, Natal, in the French and Spanish West Indies and in the large beet factories of France and Germany. They were made by Cail and Co. of Brussels and under license to J. and A. Smith of Glasgow. Daniel Dupont was the Mackay agent. One vessel would turn out two tons of sugar in a fair, average day and Spiller declared them most satisfactory.<sup>10</sup>

Spiller had always been an active civic committee man, as befitted a leading planter. He was on the Hospital Committee as early as 1872 and was a sugar judge at the first Mackay show in June 1878, with fellow judges Henry Brandon, W.H. Paxton and M.H. Black. He took first prize for vacuum pan sugar and for molasses, both recovered by "modern" (i.e. not charcoal) processes.

In October 1872 he was a Mackay Roads Trust member. Situated as he was on the wrong side of a river without a bridge he had a special interest in this authority. He would therefore have had a very special interest in a visit, in June, 1873, of Claudius Buchanan Whish who made a report on a proposed bridge over the Pioneer. Whish had fallen on hard times and had sold Oaklands, his Caboolture River plantation. He also had resigned his seat on the Legislative Council and was now a Government roads surveyor on a stipend of £300 a year. Like John Mackay he was unsuccessful in seeking a land grant as recognition of his pioneering work.<sup>11</sup>

Whish recommended a bridge at the Hermitage and this was begun almost forthwith. The vessel *Adonis* loaded timber at Maryborough in October 1875 and the

structure was finished in 1876. A Mr. Byerley, Chief Engineer of Works was in general control and E.J. Welsh, Government Foreman of Works, handled the construction. Welsh had been a member of the Bourke and Wills relief expedition which found survivor John King. He founded the *Mackay Standard* with Henry Bowyer Black in 1876.<sup>12</sup>

During most of the seventies, Spiller's home at Pioneer was but a comfortable improvement on the thatched cottage he began with. One photograph of the house and a group of colleagues shows the thatched roof and grounds covered with grass several inches high, not the geometric Victorian layout which distinguished several of the other plantation residences.<sup>13</sup>

Early in 1879 a new Pioneer House was completed, a square spacious home on high blocks with wide verandahs on three sides, enclosed by attractive iron lace railings. It was not as elaborate in appearance as F.T. Amhurst's Foulden nor the Davidson houses at the Alexandra and Branscombe, nor G.N. Marten's Winterbourne at Branscombe, but it was substantial, cool and comfortable, adorned with fine stained glass windows, burnished inside beams and furniture fully appropriate to a colonial family of substance in the mid-Victorian era. An early guest was Bishop Stanton who stayed with the Spillers in May 1879.

In spite of differences in temperament, background and fortune, Mackay's three great sugar pioneers were largely cast from the same mould . . . . . . community

John Spiller's Pioneer House. Photo: John Oxley Library.



leaders, leading lay churchmen, enterprising planters; Fitzgerald the openhearted Catholic who would make sure both fish and meat were available for his workmen on fast days, and who often supplied the fish at considerable personal expense; Davidson, an Anglican, though his wife presided at such functions as a Presbyterian church tea and Kanaka mission functions; Spiller playing host to a visiting Anglican Bishop; each, in spite of significant idiosyncracies, enjoying the high respect, if not always the public political support, of his fellows.

Among the mass of material the Spillers brought back from England in 1881 were several pieces of fine English oak. They were chosen for a pulpit for Trinity Church at Mackay and cut, assembled and polished by W.P. Marsh of Mackay. The pulpit was presented to the church about June or July 1881. The Spillers arrived back in Melbourne from their England trip in May 1881. As already noted, John Spiller was on a convalescense holiday in Tasmania in the following August when his new Fowler loco was "christened".

Sugar investment in Mackay had by this time taken on a new aspect. In late 1879, not long after the Mackay newspapers had complained of the timidity of southern investors, demand for sugar in Sydney and Melbourne increased and Australian prices rose. Money began flooding into the district after the 1880 harvest began, in a manner reminiscent of a decade earlier. Local businessmen had dossiers bulging with enquiries from their southern contacts. Such a one was local agent George Smith.

It is certain, from the speed at which events developed, that by mid-1881 Spiller had told his old friend he would sell if the right offer came along. Such an offer did come, £90,000 for Pioneer and Ashburton from C.F. McKinnon and Co. of Melbourne; Spiller was reported to have been taken aback at the size of the offer but he lost no time in completing the sale. Prior to this he had received no offers on the basis of an asking price of around £50,000.

George Smith, always a super-optimist when promoting sales of Mackay sugar lands, seems to have served Spiller, and no doubt himself, well. The reporter who rode on the first loco trip at Pioneer in August 1880 was told then an average sugar estate at Mackay was worth £50,000. Pioneer was one of the best. Its mill had a good record but it was small by the standard of factories then being planned, even by Spiller himself at Ashburton. Ashburton would be the largest mill in the district, with highly productive scrub lands if the cane Spiller had crushed from Richmond was any guide. George Smith had the raw material for an attractive enticement to a speculative buyer.

The transfer took place well before the 1882 harvest. On 11th June 1882 the *Mercury* referred to "McKinnon and Co.'s Pioneer Plantation in this district". Spiller was then on the Burdekin. The labour vessel *Storm Bird* brought 100 Kanakas to Mackay and the *Mercury* reported that of these, 50 were to go to "Mr. Spiller's Pioneer Estate on the Burdekin and 50 were for Messrs. McKinnon and Co.'s Pioneer Plantation at Mackay". Spiller and Brandon still retained River Estate and Brandon owned other land at Mackay. They sent A.M. Masterton to their Burdekin venture as plantation manager and Lewis Hoey, from Mackay, became plantation overseer.<sup>14</sup>

Spiller told *Planter and Farmer* he expected to harvest 1,000 acres in 1884. Varieties which refused to grow at Mackay flourished on the Burdekin; but the partners did not wait for the 1884 crushing. With evidence of some eagerness to complete the deal they sold to a group which became known throughout the North as the Drysdale Syndicate. The price, without a mill, was £42,000.<sup>15</sup>

Later Spiller and Brandon sold River Estate. The apportionment of interest among the two and the A.J.S. Bank is not clear but it is certain all three profited handsomely, both from operating profits and capital gain. George Smith in 1890, after River Estate had closed down, valued the property at £100,000. In Spiller's time the estate and mill were acknowledged as among the best in the Colony.

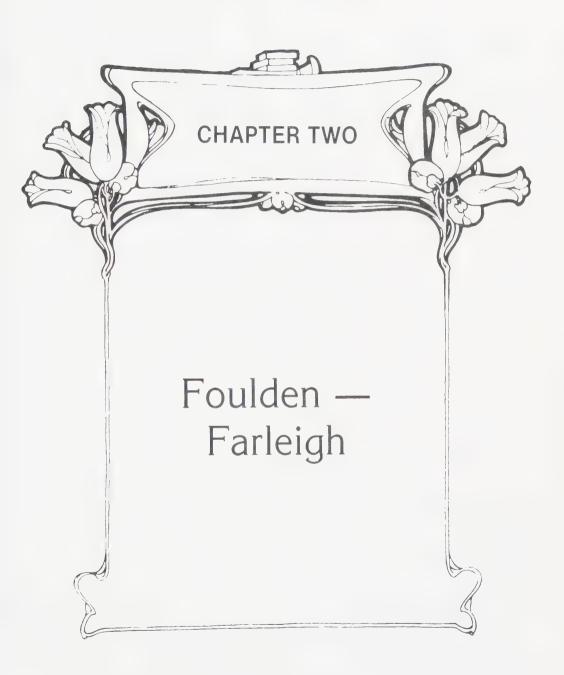
The old pioneer did not remain much longer in Queensland. In the same reminiscence which related Spiller's sale of a plough to provide cash for a trip to Sydney, Sir Robert Philp recorded that he returned finally to England with £250,000 sterling.<sup>16</sup>

Robert Ryan kept in touch with the Spillers. Spiller bought an estate in England near Corfu Castle in Dorset. He died in June 1920. A late address held by a Mackay contact was Clover Nook, Red Bridge, near Southampton.<sup>17</sup>

Just prior to World War I Spiller still owned 5,120 acres known as Carmila Estate in the southern sector of Mackay district. A group of farmers including John Adair offered him £5 an acre for it, hoping to develop it for cane. Spiller rejected the price as too low. In 1922 the bulk of the estate was owned by Mackay businessman J. Michelmore.<sup>18</sup>

- 1. M.M. 9-11-1879. See also Part twenty-two, Mt. Pleasant.
- 2. M.M. 20-7-1878.
- 3. M.M. 24-9-1879.
- 4. M.M. 24-12-1870. Davidson named George Bridgman, Arthur Kemmis, William Russell, W.F. Kennedy (with whom he fell into argument and litigation) and Michael McClusky as Alexandra suppliers.
- 5. M.M. 25-3-1893, letter by P.R.F.A. member.
- 6. M.M. 14-3-1893, letter by Edward Denman.
- 7. Related by Donald McDonald to Mackay Agricultural Conference M.M. 24-9 1892.
- 8. S.J.T.C. 15 7 1892.
- 9. M.M. 5-12-1877. See also Part two.
- 10. M.M. 17-11-1877.
- 11. Sugar Country by C.T. Wood.
- 12. Port Mackay by H. Ling Roth.
- 13. Port Mackay and D.M. Jubilee Edition 1912.
- 14. Roy Connolly in *John Drysdale of the Burdekin* p 39 says Spiller and Brandon selected Pors 423 and 424 Jarvisfield, totalling 5,064 acres.
- 15. John Drysdale of the Burdekin p 48.
- 16. Memoirs of Sir Robert Philp K.C.M.G. p 54, by H.C. Perry.
- 17. Letter D.M. 13-8-1922.
- 18. Letters D.M. 13-4 and 15-4 1922.





### Part eight

# FRANCIS TYSSEN AMHURST

About the time 21-year-old John Mackay found the Pioneer Valley in 1860, 18-year-old Frank Amhurst was adventuring with his elder brother William (who later became the first Baron Amhurst of Hackney) in the region of the First Cataract on the River Nile.

F.T. Amhurst was born at Foulden, Norfolk on 21st September 1842, the second son of William George Tyssen Amhurst of Didlington and Foulden in the County of Norfolk, Hackney in Somerset and East Farleigh, Kent. His mother was Mary Amhurst, daughter of Andrew Fountaine Esq. of Worford Hall, Norfolk.

The family's original surname was taken from a place named Amherst near Tonbridge. Late in the 18th century an heiress succeeded to the family title and on her marriage the surname became Amherst Tyssen. The son of this union changed the order of the surnames to Tyssen Amherst and his son changed the spelling to Amhurst. William restored the older spelling but Frank Amhurst retained the "u" form.

Frank Amhurst went to Eton and gained a B.A. at Chirstchurch, Oxford. In 1866 he was on a shooting expedition in the far west of U.S.A. On 26th June he was called to the bar at the Inner Temple and he came to Australia in 1869.

The blocks named Foulden and Fursden lay between Spiller's Pioneer and River Estate. Foulden was first selected by Michael Bryson, a Rockhampton merchant,



F.T. Amhurst.
Photo: Mackay Municipal Library.

probably early in 1865. In November 1865 he transferred it to Robert Wilson, "settler" of Wanganui, New Zealand for ten shillings in what seems to have been a mortgage agreement. T.H. Fitzgerald was Wilson's attorney and on 26th January 1869, Fitzgerald transferred to J.E. Davidson, a North Side block which could only have been Foulden (357 acres Sugar Selection 22 Por. 29 Bassett). On 14th October Davidson transferred to Davidson (himself) and Fitzgerald as partners and on 24th November 1870 they transferred to Amhurst.<sup>2</sup>

Amhurst also owned Por. 47 adjoining Foulden on the north and running northwards to join James Wales' Corvoy (see Part 10), and Por. 25 fronting the river and joining Foulden on the eastern side. This became known as Fursden.<sup>3</sup>

The name Fursden is well established on the North Side from Fursden Creek, known upstream as Spiller's Creek, draining into the Pioneer river. "Fursden plantation" seems to have been a vague entity. Mr. John Kerr has established that E.M. Long and his associates changed the name of their North Side river bank country from Fursden to River Estate.<sup>4</sup>

The name Fursden seems to have been applied generally to much of the country in the locality. When Amhurst cultivated land on Por. 25 the Press referred to "Mr. Amhurst's Fursden plantation" and this seems to have taken in, in general terms, cultivation on Por. 47. The terms "the Fursden plantation" and "Foulden-Fursden" may well have been real estate terms used to emphasise the spread of sugar estate development at Mackay. They were used conversationally by old timers to indicate the spread of what later was loosely called the "Farleigh Consolidated Estates".

Amhurst owned the land at Foulden but he began the sugar venture in partnership with his cousin Bertram Mitford Pocklington. A *Mercury* review in 1877 stated that Amhurst and Pocklington had bought plantation lands, then covering more than a square mile at a very high price. Little is known of Pocklington except that he was for a time a citizen of substance at Port Mackay. His postal address was given as "Mitford" and in August 1871 both he and Amhurst were members of the Hospital Committee. Pugh's Almanac for 1874 lists him as a Commissioner of the Peace. The partnership, "as sugar planters of Foulden", was dissolved on 13th March 1873.5

Abolition of purchases of Army commissions and competitive entrance to the Civil Service contributed to the emigration of sons of upper class English families to the remote corners of the earth in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Amhurst however could command capital in liberal amounts (at least by Queensland standards) and was not lacking in scholastic achievement so that it seems a spirit of adventure plus the belief of people of his class, that any part of the British Empire was merely an extension of home, were among reasons for his decision to settle in Queensland.

He did not have the restless imagination (nor the risky impetuosity) of Fitzgerald nor the dogged determination of Spiller. He lacked the technological training of Davidson and could not match the urbane self assurance of another North Side planter-parliamentarian, Hume Black. In public life he tended to be diffident but it was a diffidence well compensated for by self confidence born of the belief that he owed certain duties to his community as befitted a member of a "ruling class". As a politician the local Press called him "amiable" and "genial". Personal glimpses of him which have survived, reveal him as a thoroughly good chap.

At Foulden he spent money boldly. He laid out the residential section of the estate as one of the most attractive planter's house compounds in the colony. He planted cane



F.T. Amhurst's Foulden House, built about 1875. Photo from "Port Mackay" by H. Ling Roth, courtesy Rowan Croker.

as soon as he had land cleared and in 1872 crushed his first crop, 200 acres yielding two tons of sugar per acre. The mill, "the largest and most complete in the district", used Howard vacuum pans.

Foulden and Meadowlands were the first, and only mills, in 1873 to use vacuum pans. In 1871 he engaged 26-year-old Robert Walker as plantation manager. Walker proved a fine manager and a good community worker. Amhurst was a reliable committee man rather than an aggressive community leader but when T.H. Fitzgerald resigned as M.L.A. for Kennedy early in 1875, he was tipped by the *Mercury* as a replacement, with the suggestion that he lacked experience for the job.<sup>7</sup>

In spite of industry troubles 1875 was a year of personal success for Amhurst. He was chosen to succeed Fitzgerald as representative of the Bowen portion of the Kennedy district. On 7th September 1875 he was admitted as a barrister to the Queensland Supreme Court. Predictably, as a northern planter he advocated the policy Fitzgerald had fought hard for, "financial separation" of the north, so that a fair share of revenue would be used in the section of the colony it came from. He advocated Bowen as a capital of a northern colony which the *Mercury* jibed at as a political stance aimed at securing the Bowen vote. In those years Bowen and Mackay lost no chance to snipe at each other in their respective claims for civic pre-eminence.

Amhurst's elegant social functions rated among the best in the capital and he used these well to win over influential colleagues. In January 1877 his constituents accorded him a complimentary ball at the Olympic Theatre for his parliamentary services.

In March he retired to go to England on "business and recreation". The *Mercury* was somewhat disenchanted: "We hardly think that Mr. Amhurst's retirement from public life will cause a feeling of regret among his friends or that the majority of the electors . . . . . will be dissatisfied now they find he no longer represents them. He was not the most brilliant and successful politician. To his credit, whatever he undertook on behalf of his constituents he did his level best to achieve. A more gifted gentleman could have done no more and this being so let us now wish him bon voyage to the Old Country". On the same note the *Mercury* welcomed him back. "As an old resident who has expended a large amount of capital in the district Mr. Amhurst will receive a cordial welcome."

The electors of Mackay chose him to continue as their representative. This time the Bowen section was removed from the constituency, making him Mackay's first true representative. At the end of 1880 he again decided to go to England. It was to be a quick trip.<sup>9</sup>

The *Mercury* again took him to task: "Considerable surprise, not to say disgust has been and is being felt at the fact that Mr. Amhurst M.L.A. has taken his departure for England without one single word of intelligence from him in regard the many matters that now and for a long time have been pending, more especially as to the harbour construction at Flat Top. How many of his unhappy constituents will, we wonder, wish him bon voyage and above all a safe return?" The editor may later have wished he had left that last sentence out.<sup>10</sup>

For several years Amhurst had suffered recurrent bouts of fever. He had intended to write to Mackay of his movements and plans from his ship, the P. and O. steamer *Bokhara* when he boarded it in Melbourne. However he was not well and the letter was not written. He was more ill than anyone thought. Between Fremantle and Colombo he died suddenly between 3.15 a.m. and 6 a.m. on 3rd January 1881. He was buried at sea that day at latitude 24.27S, longitude 104.34E. Immediate cause of death was thought to have been a heart attack. He was 39-years-old.

In 1926 Frank Amhurst's niece, the Hon. Lady Cecil, daughter of William who had become the first Lord Amhurst (of modern times), passed through Mackay on a rail trip to Townsville. She was accompanied by her daughter Margaret, later the Hon. Mrs. Herbert Lane. Lady Cecil was in Australia with her husband, Sir Evelyn Cecil, a member of a visiting Empire Parliamentary party. On Mackay railway station she spoke to a man "who remembered my much loved uncle Frank and ever since then I have wished I had some memento of him to send to Mackay".<sup>11</sup>

In 1937 she did this through Mrs. H. Sterne, then in England, on behalf of the Queensland Country Women's Association. She sent letters Amhurst had written to his mother, from Foulden, and a portrait of the writer. Mrs. Sterne gave these to the Queensland Premier and member for Mackay, the Hon. William Forgan Smith.

By 1937 Lady Cecil's husband had become Lord Rockley and she wrote as Lady Alicia Rockley of Lytchett Heath, Poole, Dorset: "I can remember our delight as children when he came home in 1874 and 1877. I remember being carried by him out into the snow to see the snowman he had made us and well remember our sorrow in 1881. He taught us to cooee and inspired us with a love for Australia. In his letters he said he was very happy and how much he liked Australia, particularly Queensland, and intended to remain there in spite of repeated attacks of fever".

Three of Amhurst's letters to his family reveal the canegrower and sugar producer

and the modest politician. They tell of the measles epidemic among Islanders in 1875-76, the "rust" panic and the value to Foulden of the Eastes sugar recovery process.

The first, to his mother, was written in the Queensland Parliamentary Library on 16th February 1876: "I've had another touch of my fever but am now getting better, though still shaky. I will send you an abstract of accounts. The results are not flourishing, especially in the last season in which we made a dead loss. It would have been a much heavier one if it had not been for the new process, which at a small cost of about 30 shillings per ton, raises the value of sugar about £9. I am getting prices equal to refined sugar. If I had only had the process three years ago the nett result would have been very different. This year we had a hurricane, floods and rain which decreased the cane, then measles in the middle of the crushing, twenty Islanders died at Foulden alone, and a monetary panic and partial failure of last year's crop".

"This year's crop is looking magnificent. Everything is now right. There is also every prospect of Queensland sugar being allowed into South Australia duty free."

"I feel too ill to write more", (sgd.) Francis T. Amhurst.

After the harvest season, on 21st November 1876, he wrote: "This year's crop will give a net return of about £3,700, not so much as we expected; but the Bourbon has turned out badly — but I am glad to say I have got rid of that cane. For next year we have 115 acres of plant varieties, the hardiest cane; 42 (acres) plant Black Java and 160 of first ration Black Java. All weak and unhealthy canes have been got rid of. Total 314 acres to crush so the place is now in a most perfect working order. We have never yet crushed more than 200 acres good cane so with luck Foulden may return 600 tons (of sugar) next year".

One of his last letters home was to his brother William on 18th November 1880: "I trust a month after you receive this I shall meet you all happy and well. Our Kanaka bill is now law. Sugar has done well. Crops looking very good for next year. We got rain in time and so all is well. This is the last day of the (Parliamentary) session and I leave for Mackay, return about December 10 then if all is well I shall leave Melbourne by the *Bokhara* on December 24. I made a short speech, about ten minutes. I only spoke what I thought but as I have been much congratulated on it and people outside thought well of it I suppose I must have hit the right nail on the head".

<sup>1.</sup> D.M. 4-3-1937.

<sup>2.</sup> Details courtesy Q.S.A.

<sup>3.</sup> Pors. 25 and 47 details courtesy Q.S.A.

<sup>4.</sup> Pioneer Pageant p 49.

<sup>5.</sup> M.M. 14-4-1874.

<sup>6.</sup> M.M. 12-4-1873.

<sup>7.</sup> M.M. 24-3-1875.

<sup>8.</sup> M.M. 10-11-1877.

<sup>9.</sup> Records Town Hall, Mackay.

<sup>10.</sup> M.M. 24 12-1880.

<sup>11.</sup> Records Town Hall, Mackay.

#### Part nine

## **FOULDEN**

With his first harvest season (1872) behind him, Amhurst planned at least two other major plantation ventures. The first, which finally became Farleigh, did not eventuate in his lifetime and the second seems to have been stillborn. During 1873 and probably in 1872, with the Macartneys of St. Helens, he explored the O'Connell River to the north of St. Helens Nos. 3 and 4 runs which W.G. Macartney had named Bloomsbury. Late in 1873 he chartered *Pride of the Logan* to transport 37 Islanders, stores and implements to a projected O'Connell River plantation.<sup>1</sup>

Few details survive of the venture. About April 1875 W.G. Macartney, F.R. Bode of Bromby Park and A.M. Masterson (later Spiller's manager) visited the place and found a man named Tull had been murdered by blacks, but no activity.

At Foulden 1872 and 1873 were good years. The figures indicate the scale of the initial investment and highlight Spiller's long eight year haul. On 31st March 1873 Pioneer had 355 acres under cane; Foulden had 270. In the 1872 season Spiller cut 250 acres for 330 tons of sugar. Amhurst made 400 tons of sugar from a 200 acre harvest.

It would seem that Amhurst's vacuum pans gave him a better result than Spiller's



W.G. (Willie) Macartney (left) of Bloomsbury and Robert Walker of Foulden — Farleigh. Photo: "Daily Mercury".

open heating system. Against that, the Foulden crop was all easily treated plant cane while Spiller had a significant proportion of intractable rations. Both mills turned out 16,000 gallons of molasses which would seem to indicate the efficiency (by the standards of the day) of Spiller's plant. Across the river at the Alexandra, 24,500 gallons of molasses were left from a sugar make of 301 tons.

The measles epidemic of late 1875 hit Foulden, worst of all the Mackay plantations in terms of the number of Islanders affected. The epidemic began at Mackay about 12th September and showed up at Pioneer, Foulden and River Estate between 2nd and 16th October. In 10 days the district death toll was up to 30 with Foulden and River Estate worst affected. By early November the attack had weakened and Foulden's death toll was 20 out of a district total of 58.<sup>2</sup>

After the first two deaths Robert Walker provided attendants to watch the sick "boys" day and night. They were seized with a wild delirium during which they attacked others unless they were secured. The Islanders had virtually no immunity to the disease and complications invariably aggravated the sufferers' condition. Chills were a frequent cause of fatalities. The mill closed down for six weeks and resumed in the second week in November.

During the troubles of 1875 Amhurst, Walker and John Altereith broke new ground (for Mackay district) in sugar recovery techniques with the adoption of Eastes Charcoal Filtration Process. Juice was given extra treatment after boiling and clarification. It was heated and pumped to a raised tank. Below this was a row of six iron cylinders, each three inches in diameter and six feet long, filled with polarised charcoal made from bones. This filtered the juice which was then pumped to the vacuum pan as required. The liquor came out a clear, pale amber. The sugar was hard and crystalline at the fugals, not syrupy. Less molasses was left and so less recoverable sugar was lost.<sup>3</sup>

At the fugals another technique was developed. Clarified juice was thrown by hand into the fugal to "work" molasses from the sugar leaving a dry white product almost equal to refined sugar. The clarified juice was obtained by passing a selected quantity a second time through the charcoal filter to decolourise it. By using this instead of water as a wash, no sugar was lost and better cleaning resulted. Altereith was in charge of sugar manufacture. He said a ton of charcoal clarified three tons of sugar and then the charcoal was re-burned in iron retorts with a loss of about five per cent of the bulk. Some charcoal was imported from Europe and some procured locally. The process increased the value of the sugar made by up to 30 per cent.

The first shipment was despatched South in October 1875. Brisbane agents, Messrs. Bright Bros., told Walker the merchants considered it the equal of Yengarie refined. It was considered the best shipment so far produced by a raw sugar mill in Queensland. John Altereith secured the agency for the process. Dow and Robertson's Victoria Foundry at Mackay made the mill plant. Early customers included Wm. Sloane and Co. at Te Kowai, John Spiller at Pioneer, David Jack at The Barrie and Hume Black at The Cedars.<sup>4</sup>

Altereith said the quantity of charcoal needed to decolourise liquor made direct from cane juice was small compared to the amounts used at refineries, since the refineries often had to treat badly discoloured sugar. He had begun experimenting in 1874 with small quantities of charcoal and two filters. Sufficient liquor was filtered to make one pound of sugar. The result convinced Amhurst and Walker to use the



Foulden mill about 1876. Photo: John Oxley Library.

process forthwith. It enabled them to treat diseased cane in 1875 and 1876 which otherwise would have been unmillable.<sup>5</sup>

The 1876 Mackay crushing made a poor start. Capital was scarce and the emphasis in the mills was on inexpensive improvements. Foulden's process was one of the most effective and from the start of crushing the mill made good looking sugar. Subsequent seasons confirmed the value of the improvement. In 1876 Foulden made 800 tons of sugar and 144 tons of golden syrup. The charcoal process increased revenue by £4,460. The whole of the 1876 Foulden crop netted £30 a ton on the Brisbane market and golden syrup £17 a ton.6

The process had been in general use among refiners for most of the century. The extra output of sugar was explained by the fact that besides decolourising, charcoal also removed all crystalline matter (glucose) as the liquor passed through it. (If allowed to remain the glucose prevented proper crystallisation.) Decolourising before the sugar was formed cut losses from washing after the sugar had crystallised.

This Eastes process as adopted at Mackay represented the most advanced technique of mechanical recovery then used by local mills in this section of the sugar recovery process. (The Icery process was an advance into chemical methods.) Robert Walker and John Altereith became two highly regarded sugar mill officers. Another Foulden

identity was H.H. Robinson, a British barrister who never practised and who modestly and reliably held a post of overseer for several years. He then became a Government agent on recruiting vessels. Later he spent several years in the Warrego area and for about seven years before his death in 1919 lived quietly at Port Newry.'

Foulden's high standard of management and productive excellence were unimpaired by the rust crisis and during Amhurst's 1877 visit to England, on schedule as a usual planter's triennial trip "home", his top men also took a break. In June 1877 the Commercial Bank of Sydney was in control. J.W. Cran had been manager since January so that both Walker and Amhurst were away for an extended period. John Altereith was on a South Pacific cruise and the factory was in the care of D. McGregor. Altereith however returned for the start of crushing and McGregor became field overseer. Cran expected the mill to be short of cane in 1877 and planned to crush a 30 acre crop from A. Florence at Inverurie on the south side and a 50 acre crop from McBryde and Finlayson at Glenalbyn on the North Side.

The mill at this time was regarded as the best in the district. The crushing plant had recently been fitted with a self acting carrier and was powered by a 20 h.p. engine. Three new clarifiers from Walkers and Co., Maryborough, had been added to the original three and clarifier skimmings were very effectively re-treated. Steam power came from one 16 h.p. multi-tubular boiler and two Cornish flue boilers of 10 and 14 h.p. respectively. Syrup formed in two batteries of four pans, each with a twin teache attached to each pan. Dipper and crane gear lifted syrup to raised reservoirs whence it was transferred first to subsiders, then into copper boiling pans, through six filter beds and on to the vacuum pan. The filter process has been described. The vacuum pan was 6 ft. in diameter, powered by an 8 h.p. horizontal motor and could turn off 40 tons of sugar a week. Four 36 in. centrifugals, each with its own power unit, completed the mill plant.

Extensive re-treatment of residual syrups and molasses was carried out and good quality golden syrup, for which Foulden became widely known, was produced. Viewed even from the perspective of more than a century on, the mill plant could be regarded as sophisticated; not so the treatment the secondarily recovered sugar received in the sugar room where fugalling was dispensed with in favour of a "draining" process. Moist sugar was put into hopper-like bins with a narrow opening at the bottom covered with a wooden grating and then perforated zinc. The sugar was covered with cloth which was in turn plastered with clay to exclude air. The drainage process completed, the sugar was exposed to the air for a carefully estimated period after which it was ready for market.

The proportion of white workers to Islanders was high in 1877 — 80 blacks to 32 whites, with another 10 whites supplying firewood under contract. This in part reflected the developing shortage of island labour but it also indicates a sound management policy of seeking top productivity from the more expensive white labour.<sup>8</sup>

Even allowing for the fact that most printed descriptions of plantation life originating from the sugar districts usually depicted Islanders as happy at work, this description was frequently applied to Foulden by a variety of observers. Food was plentiful and the diet balanced, once early deficiencies and monotony common to most plantations in the beginning were rectified. Accommodation was always good and post 1875 quarters were exemplary. A tradition that Foulden was a "good place to be at"

lingered on among Islander families who lived on the plantation lands in an aesthetically pleasing "village" until well into the first decade of the next century. (See Part 38 "Mansions and Earth Floors".)

No serious labour problems occurred prior to 1875 although the drift of white labour to the Palmer had made plantation management difficult. In those years recruiting skippers supplied Islanders at around £7 or £8 a head. But the men still had to be procured and there was no guarantee when the recruiting vessels would be able to make delivery. As early as 1872 they were returning with fewer than a full complement of recruits. There were good reasons for planters to be in control of their own recruiting, either through special contacts with skippers or by owning their own vessels.

In October 1872 the schooner *Petrel*, "smart sailing and strongly built", discharged machinery for mills at Dumbleton, Lorne, Cassada, Barrie, Meadowlands, Branscombe, River Estate, Foulden and The Cedars. Amhurst and Pocklington bought her. The *Mercury* commended them and called the purchase a healthy precedent.

Planter recruiting was not only an enterprising way of coping with labour requirements; it also meant the local industry avoided involvement in unpleasant aspects of the labour trade which were attracting heated controversy throughout the British Empire. During the next 12 months a growing proportion of the black labour force arrived on planter owned vessels.<sup>10</sup>

The search for new islands led recruiters into lesser known waters and navigational dangers made boat owners less willing to charter. Unsavoury methods by recruiters from Fiji added to the bad reputation the trade was gaining. Furthermore atrocities were not only being committed against the Islanders; the natives were running up a significant score of retaliatory kills.

Petrel's owners intended using their schooner in general carrying business but in the first place she was refitted to accommodate 90 Islanders. Freshly painted a sparkling white and properly fitted out, she set sail under Captain Eul. She had on board 20 return Islanders, Government Agent G. Ramsay, G.B. (George) Long (brother of E.M. and W.H. Long of River Estate), H.R. (Harry) James (a cousin of the Rawsons of The Hollow) and Jack Firebrace, a well known district figure. She cleared Mackay on 18th November 1872 and that was the last her connections saw of her.

She had been out nearly four months before anxiety developed. There were several reasons why she could have been delayed, apart from the obvious ones of weather or attack by natives. Captain Eul had intended visiting some of the more remote and less frequented islands. This could have accounted for the fact that none of the labour vessels returning to Queensland had word of her; or she may have been delayed trying to secure a full cargo of recruits.

Finally it was obvious some mishap had occurred. Captain Rosengren of the schooner *Lyttona* returned from the Eromango area with a report from natives there that a ship had been driven ashore. He and his chief mate had seen part of the side of a wrecked vessel which they identified as *Petrel*.

The schooner *Chance*, which arrived back at Maryborough in early June 1873, had followed up this report with enquiries among villages on Eromango but none of the natives had reported a shipwreck. However a white schooner resembling *Petrel* had

shipped nine "boys" at one anchorage. A few days later, on 4th, 5th and 6th January 1873, a hurricane had lashed the island.

A large scale search developed. Recruiting skippers were asked to make, as systematically as possible, enquiries throughout the islands. A reward of £500 for any news of the lost schooner, was offered but to no avail. Apart from the family tragedies involved, *Petrel* represented a grievous business loss; but the labour position tended to become tighter. Towards the end of 1874 Amhurst and the Long brothers were reported as joint owners of the *Isabella*.<sup>11</sup>

- 1. M.M. 20 12~1873.
- 2. M.M. 23-10-1875; 26-11-1875.
- 3. M.M. 23 -9-1875.
- 4. M.M. 16-10-1875.
- 5. M.M. 13 2 1878.
- 6. M.M. 13 2-1878.
- 7. D.M. 10-11-1919.
- 8. M.M. 30-6-1877.
- 9. M.M. 23-11-1872; 15-2-1873.
- 10. M.M. 9-8-1873.
- 11. According to Marine Department Pilot Wm. Williamson *Isabella* was later owned by C.W. Kingwell, W. Lobie and Capt. Davis.

#### Part ten

# MICLERE — DULVERTON — NORBROOK

Michael Carroll came of a "good family" of County Carlow, Ireland. He landed in Sydney aged about 20 years, about 1840 and arrived at Mackay in 1866. He was an experienced cattle man by then and had modest success as a gold miner.

He acquired, in addition to other blocks, about a square mile of country on the North Side centered on Pors. 130 and 27 Bassett which he called Miclere.<sup>2</sup>

The name had special significance for him both as an Irish place name and as the name of the gold field (near Clermont) where he was said to have done well. A few months after Carroll had settled in, John Emmanuel Paine took up three small blocks adjacent to him (in early 1870), totalling about half a square mile. They included the



Miclere Plantation Mill. Photo: John Oxley Library - Farleigh Mill.

hilly area today identified by Majuba Hill. Paine planted cane in 1871 and had a steam mill ready in 1872.<sup>3</sup>

Carroll planted cane about the same time and together with Lloyd and Walker on Norbrook, which adjoined Miclere on part of its eastern boundary and Dulverton on the north, made a two-year crushing agreement with Paine.

Lloyd and Walker's Dumbleton mill was not finished until late in 1872 and in any case Norbrook was several miles by bush track from the mill in an age when it often took a month in wet weather to haul new mill plant from the river at the Devil's Elbow no more than five miles to various North Side mills.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile a young Nottinghamshireman, Edward Denman, had arrived at Keppel Bay as a self-financed migrant aboard the *Light Brigade*. Deceptively mild in his manner of address and capable of implacable determination, he brought with him a sound knowledge of the West Indies sugar industry. He had served in the British Army with the 2nd Buffs (East Kent) Regiment at Gibraltar and Malta in an instructor's post. Later, in Canada he worked for a firm of wine and spirits merchants. At Demerara, British Guiana, he became junior overseer on a sugar estate of the Rt. Hon. Sir J.W. Colville, rising to head overseer (in April 1864) and then to acting manager. After several seasons' experience, at 28-years-old, he decided to emigrate to Australia.

He joined a gold rush to Clermont but was less fortunate there than Michael Carroll had been a few years earlier. In May 1872 he was on the water between Rockhampton and Mackay on the *Lord Ashley*. He came ashore in an open boat and applied first to Hugh McCready for a job as head distiller at Pleystowe, where the mill was partly built. The position was filled but the two yarned congenially about West Indies days and McCready suggested Denman ask Paine for the manager's job at Dulverton. Paine accepted him "on appro". He had gained wide experience ranging from wind driven mills in Barbados to modern units at Demerara but the Mackay industry had features which were new to him.

He found the Dulverton engine strange (it was from Walkers, Queensland) and he had not previously seen a Wetzel open pan. He later wrote that of the 220 Demerara estates, about half used vacuum pans and the others produced sugar simply by letting the molasses settle out. He considered the Mackay distilleries primitive and from the beginning disagreed with the prevailing view of top local planters that the North Side hill country was not suitable for sugar production. He accepted Paine's intention to work only with white labour with scepticism. Twelve Danes, Scandinavians and Germans were procured from Bowen on work agreements for six months. Rate for ordinary labourers was £26 a year, ploughmen £28 and blacksmiths £52.

Faulty design had meant that clarifiers intended to be heated from furnace flues could not catch enough heat. Denman relieved Paine's worries and mystified other locals by saying that he did not need the heat. He had learned to "cold temper" juice in Demerara and early sugar out-turns from this technique at Dulverton left little molasses and brought top price in Sydney and Melbourne. However most of Dulverton's 1872 output went to the Tooth and Cran refinery at Yengarie.

The price in store at Mackay was £27 a ton and £29 in Sydney and Melbourne. Freight to the South was £8 a ton. A £3 duty applied in Melbourne and £5 in Sydney. The £2 duty difference was cancelled out by an extra £2 a ton freight charge between the two cities.

Denman and Paine were able to prove the experts wrong on the capability of the hill

country, by producing 2 tons 18 cwt. 3 qrs. of sugar per acre on Dulverton in 1872. Average return from the three farms was 2 tons 8 cwt. per acre. (Denman tended to use the word "farm" rather than "plantation" and seems to have considered himself a farmer rather than a planter. A Press letter of his in 1873 correcting official figures from these farms together with official listing of them as individual plantations led to a belief later that there had been a mill on each holding.) Under the agreement with Miclere and Norbrook, they grew and delivered the cane to Dulverton and provided bags. Paine retained half the sugar make. Equitable division was Denman's responsibility and he had also to estimate the crops prior to harvest.

Denman's misgivings about the labour supply proved to be well based and the proof was aggravated by the presence of an alcoholic female cook who "did" for both Paine and Denman. On labour problems Denman recalled: "Mr. Spiller offered Mr. Paine 10 Kanakas but Paine considered white labour more reliable and cheaper. I found it utterly impossible to employ white labour in the mill. They all gave it up, especially firing the coppers. It ended in my having to employ two Kanakas to attend the (teache) battery at 25 shillings a week beside rations and we had to get Aboriginals to attend the cane carrier".

All white hands except the engineer proved unsuited to the work and unwilling to learn and the engineer, on discovering that Denman did not use litmus paper to check the lime content of the juice under treatment, predicted disaster.

The introduction of Aboriginals to Dulverton produced one of the few happy incidents in the story of early contacts between blacks and whites. While farther out on the cattle runs, settlers considered it necessary to mount punitive expeditions against the natives, a spirit of spontaneous goodwill seems to have emerged from the first personal contacts at Dulverton.

About seven o'clock one evening a naked savage turned up. Denman saw he was fed and put him to work. He indicated others were available and soon 60 naked fine physical specimens appeared, from whom 12, men and women, were clothed and employed. The whites objected and threatened to strike if the newcomers were kept on but Denman pre-empted the move and four Europeans were sacked.

Carroll bought Dulverton some time after the 1873 harvest, having been joined in partnership by John S. Avery. (Ships manifests for January 1874 list separately J.E. Paine, Dulverton and Carroll and Avery.) Philip Kirwan has said that the partners and Lloyd and Walker of Dumbleton tossed a coin to see which plantation name should be changed, the similarity having caused confusion. Carroll and Avery lost and Dulverton became Miclere.<sup>5</sup>

The white labour experiment was dispensed with but in spite of the relatively arduous work on the hilly and sometimes stony paddocks the proportion of whites employed remained high. Shortly before he died, Carroll said the ratio was one to five. The partnership was dissolved in the late seventies but when Carroll died of pneumonia in May 1881, Avery was manager. A new mill would have been built had Carroll survived.

Edward Denman has related that one of the administrators of Carroll's estate was H.J. Jane of Glendaragh. A co-administrator was then in England. Jane decided to sell out. The Melbourne firm of Fanning and Nankivel was at that time seeking to invest in sugar. (The boom of the early eighties had by this time taken off.) Fanning was in Mackay and had begun negotiations to purchase Carroll's property.

Robert Walker, manager of Foulden-Farleigh and attorney for Sir John Lawes (Frank Amhurst having died four months before Carroll) was also anxious to secure the estate, or extra cane from outside his own plantation lands, or both. Fanning's offer to crush was better than Walker's and the offer of each was better than any other offer received. Jane and Denman were close friends and both were interested as cane growers in the terms being offered. They discussed the matter and Jane decided to sell to Robert Walker. Walker was not interested in the mill and advertised the plant for sale. The following year he purchased Norbrook from Lloyd and Walker.

In another set of recollections Denman stated that the purchase by the Lawes interests halted plans to continue Miclere and associated estates as a co-operative enterprise. The cane-cutting agreement continued after Farleigh was built and was satisfactory during Robert Walker's lifetime but after Walker died in January 1885, Lawes' attorney wrote to Jane saying that Walker had exceeded his powers as attorney and the agreement would be discontinued.

H.J. Jane, though not as vocal as his good friend Edward Denman, was just as tenacious and much correspondence followed. Jane finally consulted the Hon. A.J. Thynne, whose reply concluded the matter: ".... you have a perfectly good case for action for breach of agreement and damages but the question you have to consider is are you in a position to go to law with a millionaire?"

Old place names in the vicinity are fading from general memory. Miclere is well known, Dulverton much less so and Norbrook hardly at all. Craiglea (identifiable as part of the picturesque Janes Creek flats) and Dulverton conjoined to form the Miclere Dairy operated by Messrs. Desbois and Murry. Mr. D. (Stan) Desbois, son of Mr. Louis Desbois resided on the property until his death in April 1982. Harry Murry purchased Craiglea from J. Wales who began the dairy and whose Corvoy estate extended from there to the present Glenella township area. Harry Murry managed St. Helens station during Dyson Lacy's period of occupancy.

Spiller's Back River Estate (River Estate North) runs northward off Corvoy and was the scene of extensive urban development in the 1970's. Of all the old names Mt. Pleasant, closer to town, has become best known because of extensive commercial development which was completed in 1980.

<sup>1.</sup> M.M. 25-5-1881.

<sup>2.</sup> Q.S.A. Map J 5/2 1914.

<sup>3.</sup> Selection date P.P. p 47. Much of this chapter is taken from or confirmed by E. Denman's D.M. articles 16, 17, 22, 27 June 1921.

<sup>4.</sup> Documented details of Dumbleton and Norbrook, P.P. pp 48-49.

<sup>5.</sup> M.M. 31-1-1874.

<sup>6.</sup> M.M. 15-2-1882. See Part twelve Farleigh.

<sup>7.</sup> See Part forty-five North Coast — Early Days.

#### Part eleven

# SIR JOHN BENNET LAWES

Frank Amhurst's Mackay properties were believed to have passed under his will to his only brother, described at that time as William Amhurst Tyssen Amherst of Didlington Hall, County of Norfolk and who later became the first Baron of Hackney.

However after the purchase of Farleigh by the Farleigh Estate Sugar Co. Ltd., in 1902 and discrepancies relating to land transfers had to be handled in the Queensland Supreme Court, it was stated that Amhurst's estate had passed to parties referred to as "the Tyssens", who had died soon afterwards, and Sir John Bennet Lawes had then succeeded to, or in any case acquired the lands. (In 1842 Lawes had married Caroline, daughter of Andrew Fountaine of Worford Hall, Norfolk. She was a sister of F.T. Amhurst's mother.) About the time he acquired the Mackay properties, Lawes became the first Baronet of Rothamstead. He was by then wealthy and one of the world's leading agricultural scientists.

He was born in 1814, the only son of John Bennet Lawes, Lord of the manor of Rothamstead, near St. Albans, Hertfordshire, and his wife Marianne, daughter of John Sherman of Drayton, Oxford. J.B. Lawes Sen. died in 1822 and young John succeeded to the family estate in 1834. He was educated at Eton and Oxford, leaving the latter without a degree. He later recalled that such seats of learning were then of small value to a student whose tastes were in science and not the classics. He developed a passion for chemistry and chemical research and directed this towards agriculture.

Lawes remained always a research scientist but he pioneered the manufacture and sale of agricultural fertilizers. He built up a profitable enterprise, first at Deptford and later at Barking Creek. In 1872 he sold the latter (having previously closed down the former) but he continued to make and sell other chemicals. He was a copious writer on agricultural subjects and was a lucid speaker and lecturer. He was an enlightened landlord and employer.

Rothamstead developed as an experiment station in step with its owner's reputation and fortune. The first laboratory was an old barn. This was not replaced with a more suitable building until 1855 and then by a group of subscribers as a testimony to Lawes' services to British agriculture. Although he left Oxford without a degree he acquired an impressive list of honours and degrees later on. With his friend and colleague, Dr. Sir Joseph Gilbert, he received the Royal Medal of the Royal Society and the Albert Gold Medal of the Society of Arts. In 1877 he became LL.D. Edinburgh, in 1892 D.C.L. Oxford and in 1894 Sc. D. Cambridge. One of his lines of experiment has particular relevance to problems of soil fertility, decline of which was to cost him dearly on his new Queensland estates.<sup>2</sup>

Lawes never visited Farleigh. His entry into Queensland sugar affairs strengthened ill informed belief, both in Australia and in England, that the Queensland planters were a wealthy exploitive group. Even locally Farleigh was sometimes held in some contempt as a large and profitable plantation, contributing to the wealth of its

absentee millionaire owner and Lawes and aristocratic "grey eminence" with whom a well disciplined almost secret society of Queensland planters maintained a suprapolitical liaison in London.

It was a fanciful picture and by no means accurate. When direct political involvement at Westminster seemed appropriate and the Queensland Agent General seemed the wrong man to brief, the planters usually contacted the Hon. Harold Finch Hatton who held a safe Conservative seat.

Corporate discipline of the planters was a greatly overrated aspect of their public behaviour. Certainly they closed their ranks firmly on the question of plantation labour but this was to ensure their economic survival not primarily to preserve a social or political philosophy. To a lesser degree they were northern separationists and if they felt strongly enough about that issue they joined, as individuals, the Mackay Separation League. The meagre finances of the Mackay Planters' Association body scarcely made up a militants' fighting fund. Twelve members attended the annual meeting of the M.P.F.A. in 1884. The books showed a credit of £36/19/– after allowing for liabilities of £63/11/6d.<sup>3</sup>

The rather fanciful image of the planters seemed to gain credibility in 1884 when J.E. Davidson, then in England, pressed the Colonial Office to allow coolie immigration into Queensland. Lawes joined Davidson in this approach and the two also became linked in public memory for having made a special plea to the British Government for political separation of North Queensland. In point of fact, Davidson (who was generally thought of as the most conservative of the planters) was not committed to the use of Pacific Island or Indian, nor any other kind of labour if opponents of these types could provide a suitable alternative; and he vigorously opposed Chinese leasing cane land and working it with Chinese labour.<sup>4</sup>

The M.P.F.A. in 1885 seriously considered importing Europeans, even Danes, who were then the most expensive of all possible recruits. Davidson was prepared to use white labour as a trial "at least to begin with" . . . . . "as nowhere else was sugar produced by white labour". He saw it as preferable to closing the mills, which, after 1884, emerged as a distinct possibility.5

The idea of Lawes exerting from afar a shadowy influence over local affairs tended to be strengthened, usually when the planters were under political attack, by the actions of his Mackay manager and attorney Robert Walker. Walker was more blunt and more pointedly political than was Davidson. Thus, on the labour question he had no hesitation, as Chairman of Pioneer Divisional Board, in July 1884, in calling a meeting, which district liberals saw as a public move against Samuel Griffith's labour policies.

The connection however between Lawes and such actions of his local manager was tenuous. Walker was a forthright local planter pressing the interests of a local enterprise. He acted at local grass roots level, not the rarefied levels at which people imagined a wealthy English baronet would operate.

Nevertheless a mystique developed about Sir John Lawes and about Farleigh. Both seemed larger in the picture of local affairs than they really were, even to some contemporary North Side residents. The picture was many sided, by no means all bad, by no means all incorrect and not without aspects of comic relief. Robert Irvine Robinson, a Farleigh mill director for many years in the next century, recalled one such aspect. He was born at Miclere, and spent his early childhood years there when

the plantation formed part of the Farleigh estates. Lawes' appearance was well known from a portrait hung in the plantation office. He was "below middle stature and careless in matters of dress but his rugged and striking face at once commanded attention".6

Robinson recalled the visage as rugged indeed, but indicating great strength of character. To the Miclere Kanakas, accustomed to the generally softer features of their white overlords, the face seemed positively ugly as the portrait stared down at them with a steady baleful eye. One of the Miclere horses had, by equine standards a similar style of visage, which the Miclere "boys" were quick to note. "That fella horse old Jack Lawes", they would chuckle in the inoffensive manner they were apt to assume when they felt they could get away with taking a rise out of their white bosses.

The Queensland place name, Lawes, the locality of the Gatton Agricultural College near Brisbane does not indicate a connection between the baronet and the college. In the 1930's various parts of the college lands were named after prominent agricultural scientists. The college railway siding was adjacent to "Lawes paddock" and that became the college address.

<sup>1.</sup> He was knighted on 19th May 1882. Biographical details of Sir J.B. Lawes either taken from, or checked against Dictionary of National Biography.

<sup>2.</sup> Dictionary of National Biography.

<sup>3.</sup> M.P.F.A. minutes.

<sup>4.</sup> M.P.F.A. minutes 9-6-1885.

<sup>5.</sup> M.P.F.A. minutes 9-6-1885.

<sup>6.</sup> Dictionary of National Biography.

<sup>7.</sup> Detail related to H.A. Moore by former Gatton College principal (Mr. N.W. Briton).

#### Part twelve

## **FARLEIGH**

The Farleigh Frank Amhurst knew as a boy, is just inside the greater London boundary, about 19½ km south of the River Thames and 4½ km west of Biggin Hill airfield. The Mackay plantation he called Farleigh comprised 859 acres on Pors. 122, 145 and 146, Parish of Bassett. The main block (Por. 122 of 618 acres) was applied for by Fritz Hilfling on 29th October 1869. His brother, Emilius Christian Hilfling applied for Por. 145 (180 acres) on 29th March 1870 and for Por. 146 the next day. Emilius, a Dane from Copenhagen, had previously held extensive pastoral runs in the Bowen district in partnership with Andrew George Petersen.

He had chosen runs with Petersen in 1861 but a notice of registration recorded for December 1st 1863 for consolidation of 10 South Kennedy runs into three groupings, lists Hilfling as the only occupant. These were: 1. Elphinstone, Bin Bin, Bon Bon, Yan Yan, Pooloon (totalling 150 sq. miles); 2. Rudolpho, Abindah, Havilah (150 sq. miles); 3. Leichardt, Heidelberg (150 sq. miles). Consolidation of all 10 was registered on 22nd March 1867, the occupant then being the Trust and Agency Company of Australia (Ltd.).<sup>2</sup>

The brothers worked the three North Side blocks as a single unit. Emilius and his wife Eliza lived on Fritz's block and there most of the improvements were carried out. Arrangements by Emilius to complete the purchase of this block from Fritz were well advanced when he died aged 47 on 18th February 1871 and in July 1872 Fritz formally made over the block to Eliza.<sup>3</sup>

(Emilius was buried near his house in a grave near the road linking Farleigh House with the mill. When the Farleigh Estate Sugar Company Ltd. purchased the estates in 1902 the new owners were asked by the old to preserve the grave. A well preserved headstone is — in 1983 — in safe keeping at the mill.)

Mrs. Hilfling believed that the improvements to Por. 122 in three years of residence would confirm her title to Pors. 145 and 146. She agreed to sell the three portions to Frank Amhurst, who told her he intended to erect a large mill and machinery as soon as the two small portions (145 and 146) were transferred to him and that he would cultivate the whole block as a sugar plantation.<sup>4</sup>

She transferred Por. 122 (on which Farleigh mill now stands) to Amhurst on 11th November 1872, believing that as soon as she obtained letters of administration to her husband's estate she could also transfer the smaller blocks. However, once Por. 122 was transferred its improvements no longer applied to Pors. 145 and 146 and District Lands Commissioner Sharkey could not issue the relevant certificate of ownership. Sharkey and the Department were most helpful. Mrs. Hilfling explained the problem to the Lands Minister in a letter dated 1st March 1873, pointing out that she had no money until the transfers to Amhurst were complete and that her medical advisers had told her it was important she leave for Europe.

The Minister's office initialled the letter for urgent attention by Sharkey on 23rd

March. On 24th April he recommended issue of a certificate on the grounds that the work done on Por. 122 was sufficient to cover Pors. 145 and 146. The Department instructed him to issue the certificate on 2nd May 1873. The Deed of Grant to Amhurst for Por. 122 was prepared on 23rd May 1873 and on Pors. 145 and 146 on 3rd October 1874. Emilius Hilfling also owned a square mile at Cardwell (Selection 33, classified second class pastoral) which was forfeited on 9th March 1872.

The Farleigh purchase formalities were completed just before the rust crisis, which probably explains why Amhurst did not begin work immediately on his new mill. Edward Denman has recorded that the first cane was planted at Farleigh in 1873, yielding about two tons of sugar per acre. It may have been crushed at Foulden. Alternatively Denman's familiarity with it suggests it may have been crushed at Miclere-Dulverton.

In the late seventies a plantation and mill similar to Pioneer or Foulden, was worth about £50,000. Therefore on Foulden-Fursden-Farleigh, without tramways and with Farleigh not as well developed as Ashburton, but with the Miclere-Dulverton farm lands added as a going concern, it is reasonable to put the value of Lawes' investment at more than £80,000.

In a letter to the President of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society of British Guiana, Lawes said this about his Mackay estates: "Many years ago, I was anxious to establish by direct experiment whether all the plants of the natural order gramineae derived all their nitrogen from nitric acid; of course my climate confined my experiments to grapes, wheat, barley and oats. I was most anxious to carry out similar experiments on sugar cane and rice and for this purpose I acquired some land growing cane in Queensland but the dispute in relation to black labour prevented me from taking up these investigations". Had the economics of local sugar production been more certain last century, Farleigh could well have become a tropical Rothamstead."

It seems likely part of the reason for Amhurst's trip to England at the end of 1879 was to arrange capital to develop Farleigh. In October 1879 the *Mercury* reported two new mills would definitely be built in Mackay in 1880 and added, "It is rumoured another plantation may be formed next year".

One of the earliest Press references to Farleigh by name was in the *Mercury* of 2nd April 1881 when John Harney advertised for sale plough horses, saddle horses and unbroken draught colts. At the end of 1882 Harney was at Homebush. Henry Ling Roth was agent for the manager of Foulden and Farleigh plantations in May 1882. W.B. Napier represented Farleigh in an M.P.A. membership list of 20th November 1882. Robert Walker had proposed him for membership on 18th August 1882.

Walker bought Norbrook early in 1883 thus making a conglomerate of five estates — Foulden, Fursden, Farleigh, Miclere and Norbrook. The price of £10,000 was probably around that paid for Miclere. Though better developed, Miclere was bought virtually without a mill (for that was later sold in bits). Farleigh was one of 10 mills built in 1883. The cost was said to have been between £25,000 and £30,000. By 1888, £30,000 had been expended on the mill. It was erected by Foulden engineer George Wolfe, later of Racecourse and who supervised erection of Cattle Creek in 1906. A pipeline linked the mill to wells at Foulden.9

The local sugar investment tide had turned in late 1879. During 1882 good sugars brought £37 a ton, the best consistent price for a decade. In 1882, 18 Mackay mills made 7,841 tons of sugar from 7,984 acres. A decade earlier planters could budget on

two tons of sugar from an acre. The decline caused less concern than it should have, as millers hung future expectations on heavier plant, greater throughput and improved recovery techniques. The *Standard* confidently predicted future annual sugar output to average 20,000 tons.<sup>10</sup>

The Queenslander drew a lively picture of the river port in January 1883: "Obstruction of our river frontage street by the discharge thereinto of huge boilers, gigantic traction engines, steam ploughs and curious shaped castings . . . . . hoisted to . . . . wagons . . . . . by the very primitive method of sheer legs erected in the street and multiple blocks and tackle, the motive power being a team of bullocks attached to a rope". And later: "Never before was Mackay so prosperous". The steam tractors and ploughs were for the C.S.R. Company's new enterprise at Homebush. Farleigh's plans were not so ambitious despite its five plantation spread.

The mill began with a single set of rollers, but it was a big mill by earlier standards. Its 5 ft. 6 in. rollers were at least 18 inches wider than those used at Foulden. Thus was born one of the many misconceptions about the mill; many people later believed the

plant comprised two crushing units from the start.

The Governor, Sir Anthony Musgrave, with Premier Samuel Griffith and one of his Ministers, R.B. Sheridan, visited Farleigh while in Mackay to turn the first sod of the district's first railway on 20th December 1883. They dined with Robert Walker at Farleigh. Griffith was in hostile territory, for Walker was then in the vanguard of a planters' fight with the Government over Kanaka hospitalisation and coolie labour; and Griffith soon afterwards passed legislation barring Kanakas from working in mills.

The Queenslander said: "Farleigh has a large crushing mill and refinery, in full working order". Therein lay the seed of another misconception. Walker had installed recovery plant to make high grade raws in the Foulden tradition, using the latest techniques, powerful fugals, vacuum pans and a recovery process which could give a high grade yield. Farleigh installed refining equipment in the 1890's with very good technical results but a less pleasing financial return.

Walker told the visitors water shortage was his main problem. Surveyor John J. Cohen M.A. had by then marked out the Foulden pipe line but apparently construction was still under way. For the next 80 years water shortage was a feature of Farleigh's milling operations. The original plant had a primitive "Cuban water tower" packed with layers of bushes. Used mill water was cooled by trickling from the top through bushes to be re-used after precipitates had settled out in a reservoir. Farleigh chemists and engineers had to develop a fine technique of not only re-using water but of utilising the water in the cane itself and of removing or counteracting the effects of damaging chemicals and precipitates. In late 1883 however the water shortage was seen by the visitors as a problem under control.

Obvious disadvantages in the choice of the mill site are hard to understand in view of Walker's pre-eminence as a plantation manager. Eight years later a *Mercury* description of the mill, after a frank interview with the then manager F.W. Bolton, indicated some of the weaknesses. The mill was small (in 1891) and the plantation seemed to have been laid out according to ideas prevalent in the West Indies, where a factory was sited in the centre of an estate, without apparent regard to any other factor.

The report continued: "The mill . . . . . is badly situated and surrounded by

shallow sandy soil . . . . . though compact and well arranged (it) is unsuited to modern conditions and could not handle a large amount of cane . . . . . the best land is two to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles distant . . . . . the country is hilly and presents poor prospects for steam locos''.  $^{12}$ 

The planning was against a principle earlier espoused by J.E. Davidson, that no cane supply should be more than a mile from the factory, although Davidson had made this point in the days of compact plantations and before Spiller ran his locos; and before Davidson's own crops from six estates were handled by only two mills — Palms and Te Kowai.<sup>13</sup>

The date of commencement of Farleigh's first crushing has not been established. The record was probably destroyed with the bulk of other Farleigh papers. *Planter and Farmer* reported "great activity" on the plantation in October 1882. *The Queensland Times* reported an estimated 800 tons would be made from the 1883 crop. 14

The Mackay correspondent of *The Queenslander* in the issue dated 25th June 1883, wrote that River Estate started "last Monday" and that he believed this to have been the first mill to start. Allowing for normal mailing and pre-publication delays "last Monday" would have been before mid-June. In a letter dated 25th June and printed on 14th July the correspondent said, "most mills are in full swing". Habana's start on the last Thursday in July was fully reported. Nindaroo started on the Thursday before 20th August and in a letter dated 3rd September at Mackay *The Queenslander's* correspondent said "all mills in the district are in full swing". An exception was probably Mt. Pleasant where a major accident occurred the day Nindaroo opened.<sup>15</sup>



Farleigh House, built for Robert Walker 1884. Pictured are McGown family 1910. Photo "Daily Mercury".

In 1884 local builders Scott and Davies put up a fine new residence on a slope close to the site of the Hilfling's dwelling. This "Farleigh House" remained the manager's residence until a new building replaced it in 1974. Foulden is believed to have closed after the 1886 crushing. Its crusher was installed as No. 2 mill at Farleigh. Formation work for a tramway to Farleigh is believed to have begun in 1887.

- 1. Q.S.A. LAN/P 34; LAN/AG 519; Petersen detail courtesy Q.S.A.
- 2. Q.S.A. CLO/9.
- 3. Q.S.A. LAN/AG 519.
- 4. Q.S.A. LAN/AG 519.
- 5. Q.S.A. LAN/P34; LAN/AG 519; LAN/P11.
- 6. S.J.T.C. 15-5-1898 p 246.
- 7. M.M. 29-10-1879.
- 8. M.P.A. minutes 20-11-1882; (Harney held land at Plane Creek; Mayor of Mackay 1885; died 1889); M.M. 31-5-1882.
- 9. Q.T. 10-3-1883, reference by courtesy Mr. John Kerr; evidence 1889 Royal Commission; construction detail confirmed Robt. Ryan notes; original pipe line map is held at Farleigh.
- 10. T.Q. 19-5-1883.
- 11. The new line ran  $22\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Mackay to Eton with a  $7\frac{1}{2}$  mile branch from the 15 mile peg to Hamilton (later Mirani).
- 12. M.M. 10-11-1891.
- 13. The six Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co. Estates were: Alexandra, Branscombe, Te Kowai, Palms, Nebia and Peri.
- 14. Q.T. reference Pioneer Pageant p 73.
- 15. See Mt. Pleasant Part twenty-two.

#### Part thirteen

### **TROUBLES**

New mills built in 1883 had only one season of boom prices — the first. After that French and German beet bounties, plus a good beet season, squeezed tropical sugars off the European market. Java and China exported to Australia, aggravating the resultant price slump. By the end of 1884 good local sugars had fallen to £20 a ton from a reasonably attainable £37 in 1883. Some sugars in 1886 brought only £13; £17 was rated a good price. Nor were low prices the planters' only problems.

Island labour was becoming more difficult and therefore more expensive to secure and ever tightening Government regulations tended to add to its cost. In February 1881 the M.P.A. complained bitterly of new arrangements for repatriation. They claimed they had satisfactorily returned 3,000 Islanders in 10 years under previous arrangements. New provisions would cost £10,000 in a district "not yet recovered from two disastrous seasons".1

In January 1883 the Government ordered half yearly payment of wages to Melanesians instead of allowing the money to accumulate over the three years of their contract. J.E. Davidson declared "boys" would be left with insufficient money to stock their much valued boxes to take back to their islands. A full box, as well as indicating a happy returnee, was a good incentive to others to sign on. Robert Walker flatly declared the "boys" would be systematically robbed if paid periodically.<sup>2</sup>

Mackay district's white population was then barely 3,000 but there were enough disreputable white traders in liquor and firearms and valueless trinkets to do this on a large scale. The planters had been seeking a regulated indenture system for coolies from India. Certainly they tried hard to secure labour. A scheme to introduce Maltese fell through.<sup>3</sup>

Cingalese were tried with small success.4

In January 1883 the Government Immigration Agent and Chief Inspector of Pacific Islanders St. G. Ralph Gore, had to arbitrate in a serious dispute between Mackay employers and Cingalese labourers. M.H. Black who had succeeded Amhurst as local M.L.A. had told the M.P.A. the Government would not be prepared to legislate for coolies "in the present state of the country".

S.W. Griffith was gaining electoral support and some of Premier Thomas McIlwraith's traditional supporters were growing restive under his leadership. Black thought that as coolies could already enter Queensland without need of labour agreements, it was only a matter of time before the Griffith opposition would ask the Government to control their entry.

This, coming from a Ministerial Member, was a frank acceptance of the likelihood of success of such an opposition move. It is pertinent that the gradual official tightening of controls on plantation labour which the planters complained about, took place under the McIlwraith administration of 1879–83. It was a factor which helped win recruits to the cause of northern separation.

Samuel Griffith became Premier in 1883. Alongside fears of his white labour policies, planters' recruiting problems became more acute. Chinese recruited from the Palmer gold fields asked wages of £1 a week and were no more satisfactory than the goldfields' Chinese, Spiller had tried a decade earlier. E.M. Long contacted the Hong Kong Compradors' Guild to no avail. "Jock" McBryde of Richmond visited China and found men at a cost much above that planters had hoped to pay. By November 1883 Chinese were virtually thrown off the plantations, many to find their way to the Clermont diggings.

Henry Ling Roth (living at Foulden) was M.P.A. secretary. Later he wrote: "The urgency of the case prompted importation from Swatow and other agricultural districts but passage money, heavy preliminary expenses, the poll tax and the questionable legality of the proceedings made this class of labour of doubtful

success".6

In late 1884 the planters decided to try for indentured labourers from Europe provided the cost did not exceed £7 a head to the employer, landed at Mackay. Mulgrave planters asked Mackay to join them in seeking a Government agent to do the recruiting. The Government was unwilling to espouse an immigration programme in which it would have some responsibility for the welfare of the newcomers after they arrived.<sup>7</sup>

A serious unemployment problem existed in Brisbane but the unemployed were not willing to take on plantation work. W.H. Paxton, then in England, agreed to act as agent but he could not reach any accord with the Queensland Agent General's office. Finally the M.P.A. told the Government it intended taking no further action on the matter of European labour.<sup>8</sup>

M.H. Black tried to effect some kind of reconciliation with the Government. Though a planter and now sitting in Parliamentary opposition to Griffith, Black understood the weight of commitment Griffith bore on his labour policy; but the views of the planters and of the Government were not to be reconciled and each blamed the other for non co-operation.

In 1884 Griffith tightened screws which had already firmed under McIlwraith, by barring Kanakas from mills. Half the penalty for a breach of this rule could be claimed by an informer. This placed the planters at the mercy of any troublemaker. Davidson sought counsel's opinion and also interviewed Griffith.

The Premier said the regulation was not intended to upset established milling practices — and in spite of uncertainty and argument that was in fact how the matter worked out. Later that year Griffith had the chance to take more positive steps to have cane milled by white labour when W.G. Hodges and Thomas Pearce of Mackay made their first approaches for Government backed central mills.

Robert Walker was a busy man in early 1883 while his new mill was being erected. The labour shortage was aggravated by a growing number of time expired Islanders who, with considerable determination and significant negotiating skills, were making private employment arrangements at high rates. In May 1883 as a J.P., Walker took part in an enquiry into alleged illtreatment of Islanders on the schooner *Lavinia* between May and September 1882. A young Melbourne university student, Ernest Morrison, complained against the Captain, Government Agent and crew but his charges were later dismissed.9

It became apparent the best source of indentured labour was New Guinea and off

shore islands, in spite of trouble New Guineans were causing on the plantations. A Rev. Fr. Lanazell, with New Guinea experience, told the planters he thought there would be no trouble recruiting and seemed surprised to hear of their intransigence. He left for New Guinea in the brig *Fanny* in March 1883 but arrived back in Townsville aboard *Minnie* in July, injured from a shipboard attack. Captain Wawn also was injured and Government Agent Fowler had to have his arm amputated at the shoulder.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, between 1882 and 1884, the planters were engaged in a running battle with the Government on Kanaka hospitalisation. Late in 1883 death rate among Kanakas was about eight per cent. Then during 1884 it reached alarming proportions. One local planter lost 60 "boys" in five months to May and another was said to have lost 67 in a month.

All agreed something had to be done although Henry Brandon (still in Mackay in March 1884) pointed out in mitigation, that with the acute shortage of recruits many "boys" arrived on the plantations sick and died there instead of being returned home as incurable. Still they were dying and the manner of their medical treatment became a centre of hot controversy.

Robert Walker stood firmly against Government proposals to build a special hospital, on the grounds that the Government could best help by aiding improvement to the existing system of treatment on the plantations. Finally, after bickering ran well into the second year, the planters were levied and a Government hospital built; but it accepted patients before it was ready, at a time when plantation sick lists were large and in the ensuing confusion the doctor in charge resigned. Thus the planters had to pay the hospital levy and still treat their own "boys".

M.H. Black, again in the difficult role of mediator, finally had to warn the Colonial Secretary that a public scandal would break if the matter were not resolved. The hospital was closed and re-opened later, better equipped and after time had allowed the argument to cool.

During this turmoil J.E. Davidson (in England in 1884) and Sir John Lawes asked the Colonial Office to allow coolies into Queensland. European labour was unsatisfactory and Robert Walker drew up a scale of wages for the M.P.F.A. to show that whites were well paid by the standards of the day. No doubt Lawes got a copy.

Ploughmen earned from 15/- to 20/- for a week of 53 hours, gangers (in charge of Islanders) 15/- to 25/-, teamsters 20/- to 30/-, labourers 10/- to 15/- and horse drivers 10/- to 12/6. Of the tradesmen, Walker's list showed blacksmiths were best off with 30/- to 45/-, fitters and engine drivers 20/- to 30/- and carpenters 20/- to 40/-. Bush carpenters and fencers got from 20/- to 25/-. These rates were on top of accommodation and found.

J.T. O'Riordan, who worked on North Side plantations at this time, wrote later: "Ploughmen were in such demand that all huxter storekeepers on the road were made labour agents for the planters, to direct any passing swagman to plantations where work was waiting. Many ploughmen's wives were employed at the mills to cook for the men at 2/- per man per week, up to 12 men. For others she got nothing."

Walker declared the wage rates were beyond the capacity of the industry and G.H. Maitland King of Branscombe said he would cut wages by 10 per cent. With Davidson, Lawes and Harold Finch Hatton acting overseas and with this stand of the planters

well publicised, and with a strong Mackay separationist sentiment thrown in, the planters seemed to be a formidable force.<sup>13</sup>

In fact M.P.F.A. meetings were attended usually, only by a handful of members. Such wage reductions as were made, were introduced on an individual plantation basis and not by general resolution. By the end of 1884 it seemed as if good ploughmen would be lost if the lower wage rates continued. Maitland King did not oppose planters reverting to higher rates but suggested the M.P.F.A. should be notified. He said he would deduct one shilling a month from all Islanders' wages to pay into the Government's hospital fund. Later in the year he refuted rumours that planters were combining to lower the cane price. Sugar prices were then declining and prices offered for cane were sometimes very low.

This led a group of Eton area farmers to seek to buy their own small mill, which in turn led to Thomas Pearce and W.G. Hodges securing £50,000 from the Griffith Government to build Central Mills, a loan which enabled North Eton and Racecourse mills to be built ready to crush in 1887–88; but the price for cane was still a matter for negotiation; the M.P.F.A. did not set an official rate and if it had it is doubtful if many members would have felt obliged to conform.

By mid-1884 the planters considered their plight serious. In July Robert Walker, as Chairman of the Pioneer Divisional Board, called a public meeting which decided to approach the Government on three basic points:

- 1. Sugar prices were at a record low.
- 2. In 10 years the sugar industry had developed from an experimental, and to some extent dilettante operation, to an important industry attracting much of the investment capital and the best working material in Australia.
- 3. The class of labour on which the industry depended had failed to supply industry requirements, consequently "a large portion of our population that has been years in acquiring a thorough knowledge of the sugar industry and its allied trades, are now forced to demand a reliable supply of cheap labour for the legitimate extension of the industry to enable them to remain in the colony and compete with the cheaply produced sugar in Europe and the East".<sup>14</sup>

The argument that cheap labour was needed to safeguard the employment of whites was probably never sounder than in those months. Earlier the *Mercury* had said: "We fail to see the force of the old cry, 'perish the sugar industry if it cannot be carried on by white labour' and pointed out that hundreds of whites were unemployed in Queensland, with up to 100 each night sleeping in the Brisbane Botanic Gardens."

Small wonder nevertheless that Griffith did not want to be responsible for any more European immigrants. For employment stimulation, communities of white farmers supplying Central Mills seemed a better answer. In the short term it was no answer at all. The *Mercury* summed up the planters' argument: "We believe the introduction of coolie labour under proper restrictions . . . . . would protect the working man and give rise to employment of European labourers and artisans of all kinds". In early August the M.P.F.A. again wrote the Colonial Secretary: "Planters are denied coolies and Chinese and the supply from the South Seas has ceased. Vessels come in with only a mere fraction of their complement and owners refuse at any price to send their ships to the islands". "

The hospital issue was then still simmering and the Colonial Secretary charged the

planters with wishing to be treated as a special group, "even to the detriment of other sections of the community". 17

Other incidents did not help the planters' cause. During the Christmas race meeting of 1883 a time expired Tannaman was refused a drink (which he was legally entitled to buy) by a white liquor stall attendant. The Islander, already somewhat under the influence, objected loudly and some 40 Islanders became involved in a fracas which spilled out of the Islanders' enclosure and led Turf Club officials to barricade the grandstand to protect the women.

Horsemen from around the course rode into the melee and laid about them with such weapons as stirrup irons and hunting crops. At least five "boys" were badly hurt and one died. It seems that even after the Islanders were subdued the whites continued to beat them up. The whole incident did not last an hour but it was often referred to later as a serious riot.<sup>18</sup>

During 1884 Mackay figured in another unfortunate incident. The barquentine *Tim Keith* arrived with recruits from New Ireland for Palms plantation. It became obvious they had been blatantly kidnapped. They escaped, were recaptured and escaped again. The last two were finally caught at Sarina inlet and were suspected of having killed the child of a Chinese married to a European woman. All were repatriated.<sup>19</sup>

An upsurge of recruiting abuses led to the sentencing to death of the second mate and boatswain of the vessel *Hopeful* in 1885.<sup>20</sup>

A Royal Commission sat in early 1885 enquiring into recruiting methods. The local planters were innocent of the recruiting scandals and anxious to avoid the stigma which went with them. All they sought was a reasonably controlled indentured labour system. Only the Pacific Islanders could provide it but these it seemed were to be totally denied them, for in August 1885 by Griffith legislated to stop recruiting after 1890.

In these circumstances Sir J.B. Lawes' hesitation to outlay research capital at Farleigh probably began early in the life of the plantation; and there were other problems. Poor growing seasons set in. A long dry spell in the 1883 spring inhibited the 1884 crop. Productivity declined as soils lost their virgin fertility. Insect and plant pests multiplied, their damage becoming more serious as crop vigour declined. The prospects for prosperity on a Queensland sugar plantation grew far slimmer in the first few years of Lawes' ownership at Farleigh than they had been at any time during the halcyon decade in which his nephew had developed Foulden.

In January 1885 Robert Walker died aged 40. His successor, Frederick William Bolton, had almost no previous experience in sugar production.

<sup>1.</sup> M.P.A. minutes 1-2-1881. The two seasons were 1875 and 1876.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid 1-1-1883.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid 18-8-1882; 30-11-1882; 8-1-1883.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid 1-1-1883.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid 22-11-1883; T.Q. 31-3-1883.

<sup>6.</sup> H. Ling Roth The Sugar Industry in Queensland.

<sup>7.</sup> M.P.A. minutes 7-10-1884; 18-11-1884.

<sup>8.</sup> Ibid 3-3-1885.

<sup>9.</sup> V. & P. 1883-84 p 1435 et seq.

<sup>10.</sup> T.Q. 31-3-1883; 21-7-1883.

- 11. M.M. 17-5-1884.
- 12. D.M. 1-8-1931 Reminiscenses by Pioneer.
- 13. M.P.A. minutes 1-7 1884 and 16-9-1884.
- 14. M.M. files July 1884.
- 15. M.M. 17-5-1884.
- 16. M.M. 6-8-1884.
- 17. M.P.A. minutes 26-8-1884. The issue is comprehensively dealt with by Dr. Kay Saunders *The Pacific Islander Hospitals in Colonial Queensland*. The Journal of Pacific History Vol II Parts 1 and 2.
- 18. The incident is related by Frank H. Smith, D.M. Jubilee Edition 1912 although he gives the date as 1884.
- 19. D.M. 1912 Jubilee Edition P.P. 23, 24.
- 20. The *Hopeful* lower court proceedings began on 24th November 1884 and these and the subsequent trial proceedings lasted several months; the death sentences were not carried out.

#### Part fourteen

### THE DIFFICULT YEARS

F.W. Bolton's sugar career dated from early 1884. Walker's sudden death seems to have projected him to the top at Farleigh unexpectedly and probably prematurely. The date on which he assumed control is not known but E.M. Long proposed him for membership of the Mackay Planters' and Farmers' Association on 21st April 1885.

There were pressing challenges: "For some time the object of the sugar producers has not been to devise ways and means profitably to extend the operations of the sugar industry, but to extricate themselves from the unfortunate position in which they have been financially placed by the immigration and other policies of the present (i.e. Griffith) Government. Estates in North Queensland have, during the ascendancy of the party now in office, deteriorated by at least half their former value and may altogether be considered unsaleable". Samuel Griffith could scarcely have been responsible for it all but the decline was serious.

After the 1884 crushing great changes occurred on the estates. Davidson had closed, or was contemplating closing Nebia, Alexandra and Branscombe mills, leaving Te Kowai and a new mill at Palms to handle the crop from the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Company's six plantations. The closure may have been inevitable as an efficiency measure, to replace old plant, but Davidson's remark to the M.P.F.A. that a trial of expensive white labour was preferable to closing the mills indicates that forced shut-down as distinct from phased closure was a definite threat. It was rumoured the

M.M.S. Co. would shift to the Northern Territory so that Javanese could more easily be employed but Davidson was always reticent on such reports.

Mill plant was being rapidly upgraded but the most significant change took place at Habana. E.M. Long recognised that the key to plantation profit lay in the mill and that the mill had to have adequate cane supplies. At Habana, Long and William Robertson decided to let farmers provide some of their cane supply and in 1884 began subdividing the estate and leasing living areas. Long switched to the central mill concept of supply, but not of ownership, four years before North Eton crushed.

Planters strove to match low prices by increased production and greater milling efficiency. The district had ample room for expansion and the planters therefore were not opposed to the central mill experiment which the Griffith Government sent W.O. Hodgkinson to look into at Mackay, early in 1886. There was no market surplus and as far as Frederick Bolton was concerned at Farleigh, central mills, even one at The Leap, which was suggested to Hodgkinson, would have had no effect on his operations, served as Farleigh mill was by its five plantations; at least so it seemed. It was soon to be found that cane supplies were not so easily obtained.

District sugar production jumped from 11,255 tons from the 1884 crop to 25,000 for 1885. Sugar per acre harvested increased from about 16 cwt. to more than 1½ tons, reflecting a better season and the extra tonnage from new ground. Commenting on the years 1885–88 the *Mercury* drew a comparison with West Indies estates, several of which had closed down under pressure of bad conditions. By contrast, "Mackay district planters kept on providing new plant against the inevitable rise in price".<sup>3</sup>

In these circumstances the Foulden rollers were added to the Farleigh plant.

Wet weather in 1886 cut district output to 16,138 tons. Factory recovery and sugar quality became very important and the millers were encouraged by a slight firming in prices in 1887 with ration sugars at £15 to £18 a ton, yellows from £19 to £21 and whites £24 to £26. $^4$ 

At this time Farleigh was building up a good reputation for fine quality whites. An informative estimate of Farleigh's position in these years is possible if a *Mercury* review of 2nd April 1887 is read with the knowledge that in 1880 Foulden had made 600 tons of sugar. "The (Mackay) industry is absolutely sound and as an investment for capital is as good as any in the colony, but that does not make our present planters well off. In most cases capital accounts are large and machinery antiquated and wholly inefficient".

The review added that £40,000 was needed to build a mill to make 4,000 tons in 100 days and provide tramways as well. Apart from Homebush, local mills did not make more than 1,000 tons in a season and capital accounts would average well over £40,000. Given even the low rate of 10 per cent for interest and redemption, £4 a ton profit, therefore, would be needed to make a season financially successful.

Local mills were not achieving such profit. Some were barely making £2 a ton. Thus Farleigh's turnover from its five plantations, even if the mill's production was near the 1,000 ton mark, with the low prices then ruling, was probably not much better than the result Foulden achieved from 600 tons in 1880. Other figures indicate how tightly district plantation resources were stretched. More than 19,000 acres had been planted for cane in 1884 and in 1887 the area was still maintained at about 17,500 acres, but the Islander work force fell from almost 4,500 in 1885 to just over 2,000 in 1888.

The industry and the town watched with keen interest the beginning of the "central

mills experiment". North Eton crushed a small amount of cane in 1887 and Racecourse was ready in 1888; and E.M. Long and William Robertson were quietly pushing ahead with their small farm plans. Then drought ravaged the 1888 crop. Only 11,539 acres were cut; only 5,464 tons of sugar were made. On comparative figures the year competes with the rust season of 1875 as the most disastrous crop year in Mackay's history. Coming as it did in the middle of a period of depression, 1888 probably takes out the dubious honour.<sup>5</sup>

If the sugar industry had to suffer disaster it was fortunate, so far as getting help was concerned, that the whole colony was affected at once. Queensland's rural economy seemed to be facing damage which could be permanently crippling. Premier Boyd Morehead, who as Leader of the Opposition had resolutely opposed Griffith's central mill vote, appointed in late 1888 a Royal Commission to report on the sugar industry—the cause of its plight and the best way to remedy the situation. W.H. Groom M.L.A. was chairman. He was scarcely regarded as a friend of the sugar industry. His constituents were Darling Downs wheat men; but few doubted he would conduct a penetrating and challenging enquiry.<sup>6</sup>

H.E. King, a barrister with extensive parliamentary and political experience and A.S. Cowley, recently elected M.L.A. for Herbert were the other members. Cowley was a fortunate choice for the industry. He had been a plantation manager on the Herbert River and was aware of shortcomings within the industry. He believed island labour had to be retained and sympathised with the sugar men in their travail. At times his approach as a commissioner seemed frankly partisan but his personal integrity was

never doubted, by supporter or opponent.7

F.W. Bolton told the Commission capital invested in Farleigh-Foulden was £151,699. (It had become plantation practice to include Miclere and Norbrook in the general term "Farleigh" and Fursden had ceased to be thought of as separate from Foulden.) The estates comprised 3,400 acres, of which 1,159 were cleared for cane but in 1888 only 711 acres were cut. These gave 310 tons of white sugar and 10,000 gallons of molasses. Livestock consumed most of the molasses but it was intended to refine 500 gallons for golden syrup. Cost of the mill machinery was £30,000. (If buildings and tramway costs are added, the previously mentioned Press estimate of £40,000 for a 1,000 ton normal season capacity mill would seem to be fairly accurate.)

Working expenses for 1888 totalled £13,657 including £1,425 for purchased cane. The estates employed 45 Europeans, 153 Kanakas and 35 Javanese. The 1888 crop returned no interest on the capital invested. Obviously Farleigh's overheads and returns (even discounting the bad 1888 year) compared most unfavourably with the

positions of both Pioneer and Foulden 10 years earlier.

Plantation dependence on Melanesian labour emerged clearly from all the evidence. It was generally accepted by witnesses that one Kanaka for five acres cultivated was a reasonable requirement. Farleigh had 153 for 711 acres harvested in a bad year. In better years the acreage per man was slightly higher but then Bolton used extra labour when he could; 35 Javanese were also employed. On the M.M.S. Co. estates steam ploughs were in use but J.E. Davidson also said an ideal ratio was about one man to five acres.

(Davidson's perseverance with any kind of labour — Javanese, Cingalese, Malayan or Chinese led a sarcastic *Mercury* correspondent on 19th August 1889 to comment, after arrival of a bunch of Javanese; "Unless their natural ferocity turns them on one

another there will in a few years be such a population of yellows and skewballs as would send a West Indies planter into raptures.)

Bolton said he had found Europeans unsuited to cutting cane. Davidson said stooping in the hot sun affected the health of Europeans. "It ages men rapidly", he said. Bolton was sure field work did not affect the health of Islanders "judging from their appearance on arrival and departure". He thought field work affected the health of Europeans "to some extent".

Years later old timers who had worked with Islanders believed the cause of adverse effects both real and imagined on European field workers was more psychological than physical. The average European migrant was a man with self respect, hoping for betterment. Menial work, even at better than the lowest rates of pay, tended in his view to downgrade him in the lowest ranks of the labour force. It only needed a stinging sun or a hot, humid early afternoon in February to make him feel physically ill as well as mentally demoralised. Many North Queensland working farmers know how insidious this malaise can be.

Farleigh crops were affected by rust, caterpillars and grubs but Bolton blamed the depression chiefly on the cost of coloured labour, low prices and bad seasons. He recommended an unlimited supply of cheap labour, legislation to raise prices by such methods as reciprocal trade agreements and subsidies, removal of duties on mill and field machinery and a Government irrigation scheme.

Bolton's reference to "rust" gives grounds for conjecture. Other witnesses said there had been no serious disease in the cane fields since 1875. A high degree of stool mortality in ration crops afflicted the North Side flat country during the eighties and was aggravated by grubs, nut grass and declining vigour in the popular cane varieties, for the rest of the century. Under such conditions the organism which caused "rust", even if not greatly prevalent, could have caused relatively serious of damage.

The appointment of the Royal Commission gave sugar men new heart, although there were doubts on the nature and the timing of the help it would recommend. The Commission's findings put the term "cheap labour" as it applied to Islanders in its proper perspective. The cost, of about 16/- per week per man was more than a white labourer in Europe received producing beet; and it was not much less than the minimum 10/- a week plus found and shelter white field labourers earned in Queensland — if they could be induced to do the work. King and Cowley recommended new canes, irrigation, negotiation for duty free entry of Queensland sugar to Victoria and South Australia and above all continuance of "Polynesian" labour, "at least for some years".

Groom's separate report related more to the condition of the industry than to suggested remedies. He criticised North Eton management (and later in 1889 entered into a Press controversy with J. Antoney on North Eton affairs). He praised Racecourse but was gloomy about its prospects. He pointed out the debilitating effect of planters paying interest and charges on large areas which were not producing. Farleigh's five plantations with only 1,159 acres cultivated were not specified but were certainly a case in point.8

Groom conceded both the drought and low prices but criticised plantation management. (He referred not just to Mackay but the local industry contained most of the common faults.) There were too many mills for the area cultivated; high rates of interest were chargeable to comparatively small areas cultivated; investment

confidence was low due to the various reasons given for the depression and to the risk of beet competition continuing for some time. He gave the industry little sympathy but he did not deny it was in trouble.

Bounties and price manipulation on the European market have always been important factors in the sugar trade. Two Press references serve to indicate the remote pressures which affected Australian returns in the 1880's.

On 10th November 1887 the *Mercury* told how a syndicate controlled the German price (and therefore the price to many producers outside Germany): "One of the few successful 'corners' this year . . . . . has bought about 75,000 tons of beet sugar and is able at present to dictate prices in Germany". (German production had dominated the world sugar trade for some years.) "The fall in prices had gone too far and a German syndicate bought up the available stocks with the intention of letting them out, bit by bit. If the sugar thus sold was to be consumed and so physically reduce the supply, the price was (equal to) 12/3 per unit. If the sugar was needed only to relieve 'bear' speculators, 14/9 was charged. By taking its profit from the speculators the syndicate escaped the odium of being called price inflators".

Several months before the Queensland Commission sat, world producers agreed to abolish sugar bounties. It was an agreement in principle, an effort to lift the sugar industry from a state of world wide depression, but it was not supported by administrative machinery. It carried no great promise of relief, a fact which Groom pointed out in his report. The parties to the trial were in fact arguing spiritedly at the time Groom was writing his report and France remained partly aloof from bounty abolition moves.<sup>9</sup>

The local producers were but leaves in a gale as the *Mercury* explained: "In the race for outside markets bounties on exports . . . . . became a drag on European treasuries and not income inducers, as they were intended. In Europe the practise ran deeper into trouble and Governments were paying up to £9m a year to maintain their sugar industries. By comparison, at that time profit from all Mackay mills scarcely exceeded £20,000."

The optimism generated by the appointment of the Commission increased with publication of its findings and in June 1889 A.S. Cowley introduced a motion that Parliament in its next session adopt some means of encouraging the sugar industry.

Morehead stated his Government did not envisage extension of "Polynesian" labour or imports of cheap European labour. Coming from a Conservative administration this was a blow to the planters and to most of the growing number of independent farmers. A planters' conference in Townsville had only recently sought extension of recruiting to 1895 and had agreed to rest content with Kanaka labour and not push for European migration. A.S. Cowley finally introduced a motion in Parliament seeking a five year extension to recruiting but failed to secure the numbers.

Canny observers began to look to alternative survival measures. The *Standard*, in a marked change of stance for the old "planters' rag", said that if the plantations could hang on for a few years and were then able to pass their lands to a new breed of land holder, the future, for the owners, might not be as grim as it appeared. 12

News Bolton sent Lawes, though perhaps tinged with hope, was not all good. About the last day in August 1889 a roller shaft broke, causing a crushing delay of several weeks. A whole new roller unit had to be procured. A rough forging was made by

Smith Forester and Co. of Brisbane — it weighed three tons — and sent to the Victoria foundry at Mackay where proprietor William Robertson supervised the machining necessary before it could be installed at the mill. The value of the Farleigh crop was seriously reduced through having to be treated when much of it was past prime maturity.

- 1. Evidence to 1889 Royal Commission; M.P.F.A. minutes.
- 2. M.M. 15-10-1884.
- 3. M.M. 12-5-1888. Confusion on size of crops in particular years has arisen from the practice of ending statistical years in March. Thus 11,225 tons is sometimes given as the figure for the 1885 harvest, when in fact it was for the 1884 crop for which figures were published after March 1885.
- 4. M.S. August 1887.
- 5. Figures from the M.M. Jubilee Edition 1912. Though at variance with other lists this list is valid enough for comparative studies. Total tonnages shipped up to certain dates appear to become confused with harvest season totals.
- 6. C.A. Bernays in *Queensland Politics During Sixty Years* calls him "the big panjandrum of the Darling downs bunch . . . . . extraordinarily industrious".
- 7. G.C. Bolton *A Thousand Miles Away* p 198 gives these details of King: M.L.A. Wide Bay 1870-74; Ravenswood 1875-83, Secretary for Mines and Public Works 1874-76; Speaker 1876-83; defeated for Maryborough 1888. Bolton p 203 calls Cowley "a bigoted partisan, scrupulously honest", Cowley became Speaker (1893-96) and was knighted in 1904.
- 8. M.S. 29-4-1889 and 1-5-1889.
- 9. M.M. 15-15-1888.
- 10. M.M. 6-11-1888.
- 11. M.S. 6-5-1889. Claimed the Townsville decision did not represent the majority view of the Queensland planters.
- 12. M.S. 2-10-1889.

#### Part fifteen

### YEARS OF HOPE

The 1890 season was a good one. Mackay's total cane area, at 15,791 acres was only marginally better than it had been eight years earlier but the sugar make of about 19,500 tons was second only to the record 21,995 tons made in 1885. A general air of optimism subdued forebodings caused by the imminent end of Kanaka recruiting; and even that dire event was not going to have an immediate dramatic impact since cessation of the trade did not mean immediate repatriation of all Islanders.

The mills exploited sugar recovery techniques to the limit. F.W. Bolton allowed a Monsieur Faucher of the firm of Faucher and Clarke to experiment with recovery of sugar from molasses. This and similar systems of "doubling" had been successful in mills with low initial recovery rates but the recovery end of the plant had always been strong at Farleigh and no spectacular results were achieved in this instance.

Some years earlier, mills (c.f. Foulden) had tried double recovery techniques — extra treatment of molasses and maceration of refuse — but it was slow and expensive measured against sugar gained. Effet batteries and vacuum pans proved more profitable. For a long time after open boiling fell from favour, J.E. Davidson maintained the proper place for a vacuum pan was in a refinery and that a good miller, by careful husbandry and attention to technique, could make good sugar by evaporating at atmospheric pressure.

The sugar Press, with such examples as new techniques in sugar chemistry being developed by the C.S.R. Co. and the progressive thinking of E.M. Long at Habana, advocated employment of analytical chemists in mills.

In 1891 district output fell to 13,473 tons; North Side crops, especially ratoons, were poor; River Estate closed down. E.M. Long had declared his intention of subdividing all the Habana lands and surveyors were then at work. The bad years had taken their toll and Australian sugar technology had slipped.

Australian sugar machinery was considered "mostly old fashioned and the mills small". Newer American mills had more rollers and had shredders attached; triple effets were replaced by multiple effets, or the Yaran pan, and the mills could make 10,000 tons in a season. The *Mercury* said: "If some strong company like the C.S.R. could be guaranteed 80,000 to 100,000 tons of cane at 15/- a ton it could be induced to build such a mill". (Homebush was then offering 13/- a ton for cane.)

The local industry was trying to break the bonds of six years of economic inertia and despite cautious optimism the early nineties, with a banking crisis and the rise of industrial militancy, were not good investment years; and at the very beginning of the decade conditions seemed to grow worse before they began to get better.

Against the closure of River Estate and the subdivision of Habana, Farleigh seemed a rock of solidarity. The public knew little about the business structure of these sprawling assets of a wealthy absentee owner who had never seen them, but what could be seen was interesting — irrigation trials, fertilizer trials; and the mill maintained the

reputation Amhurst had first established of making high grade sugar. Old timers have recalled evidence of mismanagement but the *Mercury* called Bolton "forward looking".<sup>2</sup>

He installed a sugar cubing machine in 1891 (from Mirlees, Tait and Watson of Glasgow). Sugar cubes were popular in Europe but rare in Australia outside the homes of the metropolitan elite. The mill had obvious disadvantages. Bolton planned to introduce maceration plant, watering megas from No. 1 mill to allow more complete extraction of juice at the second set of rollers. The makeshift nature of the carrier between the two mills rendered this difficult. The carrier had originally been an elevator, designed to move whole cane stalks, not a mass of crushed fibre. It would not hold water, nor retain steam. Alterations were planned which would allow the installation to work in 1892. Similar equipment was installed at Habana, Homebush and Nindaroo by 1891 and North Eton installed it in 1892.

The Farleigh sugar room, from the dryer to the bagging station, was efficient but small. It was heated by steam pipes. In the years which followed, as the factory expanded, these and similar groupings of pipes were re-routed to other uses and the alterations in turn subjected to further adaptions. In later decades, when Farleigh became by 1891 standards a very large mill, the banks of steam pipes made a most impressive show for the untrained eye, but they were an abomination to engineers.

Bolton attached great importance to his manure experiments and had been very pleased with an irrigation trial carried out in 1888. This gave 36 tons of cane per acre from forest land on Foulden — not spectacular by some standards but nearly double the production figure of most North Side lands at the time. Farleigh sales of sugar cubes ran to about 400 boxes a month in late 1891. The wood was sawn and boxes made on the estate.

One locomotive worked in 1891 and extra rails were then being procured from River Estate. Bolton introduced a mechanism which was to become, in one form or another, almost a geographical feature of sugar country until chopper machines replaced stick harvesting some 70 years later. This was the traverse, or cane lift, for transferring cane from drays or wagons on to tram trucks. He also introduced extended shafts on cane drays, removed front and end boards and had cane loaded lengthways instead of standing up. It has been believed that ratchets were attached to drays to allow loads to be tightened down with ropes or chains but the question of ratchets on Farleigh drays and tram trucks is one for experts and old timers to ponder.

Bolton's traverses were said to have increased carrying capacity of his tram trucks by half due to loads being compacted when lifted in their slings. Few cane workers who have handled sling loads would agree that lifting bundles in slings would compact cane to that extent. This writer (who has handled many sling loads of whole stick cane) believed, as did others with whom the matter was discussed, that the compaction was achieved by fitting ratchets, the load having been tightened, first in the field and then after transfer to the tramway.

However Mr. George Wright of Pioneer Estate, who has an impeccable memory for such details, says there were no tightening chains (and therefore no ratchets) on Farleigh tram trucks prior to World War 1. The load was "pegged in" by short stout lengths of cane expertly thrust into the load so that stalks in bulk were wedged out against the stanchions. Probably nothing short of photographs of Farleigh's early cane handling gear would resolve the point.

Few expensive improvements were made in 1890-91, pending solution of the labour problems caused by Griffith's decision to stop Islander recruiting. Political and social

developments brought a solution with welcome suddenness.

Griffith and McIlwraith came to power in coalition in 1890. Industrial militancy had begun to increase in North Queensland while the sugar industry was slipping into depression. A maritime strike in 1890 and a shearers' strike in 1891 left no doubt about the gap between Griffith's liberalism and the philosophy of the rising labour movement. Unionists with no particular ambition to become small farmers had little interest in setting up communities of independent sugar growers. Labour movement opposition to introduction of Italians became another obstacle to Griffith type plans for a farmer based canegrowing industry. All these forces ran together just when it seemed the planters were coming round to the idea of subdividing their lands into farms and concentrating on milling.

Griffith (Premier) and A.S. Cowley, his Agriculture Minister, visited the North early in 1892. Opposition to recently arrived Italians was intense. There seemed little likelihood, even to Cowley, that island recruiting would be resumed.<sup>4</sup>

Griffith realised nevertheless that however much he had been irked by planters in the past, his small farmer policy was in jeopardy without a labour supply, as indeed was the viability of the whole industry and a fair slice of the colony's economy; and the only source of labour was the Pacific islands. On 12th February 1892 he proposed a resumption of the island labour trade, but his manifesto explaining the proposal was explicit about one aspect: the measure was a transitional move to allow the sugar industry to carry on while the change to small farms and white labour took place.

The manifesto seemed promising but it was still only a proposal. F.W. Bolton was in Brisbane at the time and well situated to press an advantage. As manager of a noteworthy, if little understood North Queensland sugar enterprise, he was ideal for a Press interview and the Brisbane *Courier* snapped him up.<sup>5</sup>

He said that unless the labour question was resolved and the supply of Islanders continued he was instructed to close the estate as soon as existing labour arrangements justified the move — in two or perhaps three years' time. He said £140,000 had been spent on the Farleigh plantations. "We got a special supply of Kanaka labour in 1890, the last year allowed for recruiting. This was regardless of expense and in the hope of bridging over the difficulty until we should get an extension of South Sea Island labour. In the meantime I am spending no money for improvements such as would be made if we were assured of a continuance of the labour."

He stressed that labour costs still had to be compatible with sugar prices. "For the past four or five years our Islanders have cost £32 each. Formerly, in the days of success, the average wage was about £10 per head. We have paid the £32 each, not because the labourers were worth it but because we were compelled to do so."

He claimed it would take 10 years to restore confidence. Acceptance of such a period would fairly indicate the Government's intention to deal fairly with the matter and would be better than for an uncertain time. Bolton rejected the idea that the Premier's proposal was only an interim measure to allow for the economic and social restructuring of the industry.

"In my opinion", he said, "the labour should be permanently assured, for I think the conditions of sugar production will always be the same". From a public relations point of view and in view of progressive moves Bolton was soon to make to settle

farmers on his estates and to crush cane from independent growers, this remark would have been better left unsaid. The interview continued.

Question: In the event of the extension (of island recruiting) being for 10 years would you go on with the industry?

Bolton: Certainly; provided the labour can be got at a price that will pay to produce sugar we will go on and will immediately start improvements.

He said Mackay depended on the sugar industry. At Farleigh white employees were never fewer than 50 to 70 when the plantation was in full swing. "Take the foundry in Mackay. That used to be in full blast night and day. The ring of the hammers could be heard at all hours. Now few hands are employed and the only work done is an occasional casting."

The need for action, he said, was urgent. Plantations had closed because labour had been obtained only at compulsory prices and for a limited period, which was rapidly drawing to a close; on a sugar plantation it was necessary to plan two or three years ahead. In 1885 Mackay had had 25 mills. It was doubtful if more then 10 or 11, besides the Central Mills, would work in 1892 and this meant an enormous falling off in employment for white men.

Bolton was not prominent in public affairs and he was generally publicity shy, although on several occasions he proved remarkably accommodating to the Press. This time the interview rambled on and he was given every chance to put the planters' view, with occasional leading questions steering the argument his way.

Bolton saw difficulties with a Griffith suggestion of short term (say six months) contracts with New Guineans. He thought this could be experimented with only after Islanders were secured. He pointed out that labour was needed for growing the crop as well as for the harvest. On half yearly contracts labour would have to be supplied in relays. He added that about 10 farmers supplied Farleigh and these needed Kanakas from time to time. (Others agreed the continuous process of breaking in new "boys" would greatly reduce the efficiency of the work force.)

Sugar industry critics have often been hard to convince that canegrowers cannot easily diversify, or switch to another staple crop. Bolton answered this. Corn, he said, paid only as a catch crop and in any case for northerners to switch to corn would affect the security of southern farms. "I think I never gave less than 3/9 a bushell for maize until the beginning of last year. For the past five or six months I have been getting it at an average of 2/4. Then I used to feed 150 horses but as our operations contracted our feed requirements contracted."

Sugar growing in Mackay district, he said, was yearly becoming more expensive as the land became poorer and needed more manuring. He reiterated the cry which had always been the crux of the planters' case in the black labour argument, that management had a chance of coping with low returns but not with lack of labour. "We shall stand the (low) prices of sugar only give us elbow room", he said. He soon had it. In mid-April 1892 the "Polynesian" Extension Bill became law.

Like most "Kanaka" regulations some of the new ones were irksome and provoked criticism, but the overriding concern of the planters now was for the price at which labour could be obtained. Characteristically, Bolton did not rush into print with a critique of the new act, but predictably J.E. Davidson made public a detailed assessment and criticism of the effect the new provisions would have. He has been

charged, in retrospect, with ungracious back biting but his criticisms were in fact a practical and thoughtful statement of problems which could and did arise.8

As soon as it became apparent the bill would pass, Bolton went on with expansion

plans and arranged to import 600 tons of manure direct from Chile.9

Farleigh was then putting up its golden syrup in 2 lb. cans. These were branded as a Farleigh product, unlike the former Foulden output which was supplied in bulk to Brisbane. They sold well throughout the colony. Farleigh cubes were also increasing in favour. Bolton distributed free 10,000 small boxes, each containing "eight of these dainty morsels". One Brisbane grocer, after including one box in each customer's parcel, received 40 orders. "Ask your grocer for Farleigh tablets", ran a two inch advertisement in the *Standard*. 10

Bolton proposed laying six miles of tramway to The Leap to tap 2,000 acres, including the Norwood estate (not to be confused with Norbrook). This meant the installation of another set of either 5 ft. or 5ft. 6 in. rollers at the mill. It is not clear whether this was intended to give Farleigh a three unit crushing train, or whether the old Foulden rollers would be discarded.

The proposal was discussed at a luncheon meeting, Bolton arranged at The Leap Hotel. Twenty farmers turned up. They were told the line and two locos would not return interest on the capital cost of £10,000 for several years. On this basis Bolton offered to erect lifts, pay 11/6 a ton for scrub canes and 12/- for forest plus a bonus of 20/- for each 100 tons any farmer supplied. All agreed and it seemed 8,000 tons of cane would be supplied to the line in its first year.

The agreement brought spirited denunciation from Edward Denman, now permanently established at Etowrie. He called it "the thin end of the wedge in a determined effort to lower the price of cane". Thirteen shillings a ton, he claimed, was the admitted price below which any farmer could not afford to grow cane. He argued that by offering a low price, mills deprived themselves of cane supplies at a time when throughput was vital to profits: "Eton Central Mill pays 14/- (a ton) and shows a good profit and the Victoria (near Eton), which offered only 9/- is now only a £100,000 monument to someone's folly. If Sir J.B. Lawes can get cane for 11/6 why should Long and Robertson (at Habana) and Homebush pay more?" 12

Despite his shyness of publicity, Bolton as a "big" planter could not always avoid the spotlight. Thus during the 1890 wharf strike he and Davidson had been accused of offering Malay workmen as strike breakers on the Mackay wharves. Both denied the charge. On cane prices, Denman's remarks were the first in a vigorous Press argument in February 1893. It was the first of many public controversies which were to involve Farleigh affairs over the next 40 years but it was one of the briefest. Bolton let the pros and cons swirl about him but took no part in it. One writer claimed the low cane price would "swell the profits of an absentee millionaire". Another, damning Farleigh with faint praise, declared the Farleigh price reasonable "as everyone knows that Farleigh has never paid interest on the money expended". Denman returned to the fray with the claim that since Farleigh sugar was worth £4 a ton more than that made by central mills, Bolton could afford to pay 17/– a ton for cane. 13

This was a concept with far reaching repercussions. Arguments on cane price based on cane quality were relatively easy to follow though they became heated and complicated when mills sought to analyse growers' deliveries and pay on sugar content. Untold complications were implicit in the proposition that a miller who, by

efficient processing and extra capital outlay, had increased the quality of his sugar, should be obliged to share his extra profit with his suppliers; but these were matters largely for the future. For the present the emphasis was on production of tons of cane in the fields and on capacity to handle it at the mill.

The year 1893 was not without incident. Record breaking floods in Brisbane early in the year destroyed 200 tons of Farleigh refined sugar. In mid-July a centrifugal burst, killing a Japanese mill hand. A little over a week later another burst, seriously wounding an employee named Edward Oxnam. These were Weston machines. Bolton wired Glasgow for replacements and made do with two other Westons of a different pattern. The incidents caused some people to jump to the conclusion that the faults were with colonial made machines and therefore these were inferior. Local foundrymen rushed to the defence of colonial manufactured equipment and had their arguments substantiated so far as Farleigh's mishaps were concerned when it was revealed the fugals were imported. Homebush also used Westons.

In August 1893 rumours spread that Lawes was negotiating to buy Ashburton. The *Standard* wrote: "It may be surmised that Sir J.B. Lawes proposes to accept a position on the north side of the river similar to Homebush on the south side". The rumours were soon confirmed. Ashburton, if it got the crop, could make 2,000 tons of sugar and Farleigh 1,600 to 1,700 tons. The two mills would be combined and farmers relied on to augment the plantation cane supplies. A sugar make of 5,000 to 6,000 tons seemed assured.

By November, amalgamation plans were well in hand. A tramway between the two mills was almost complete and Ashburton plant was to be shifted to Fairleigh after the crushing season. This would give ample crushing and steam power with two triple effets and large vacuum pans and make "one of the most powerful mills in the colony".<sup>14</sup>

Before tracing the fate of these expectations, it is appropriate to pause and see how other North Side plantations had fared.

<sup>1.</sup> M.M. 14-4-1891.

<sup>2.</sup> M.M. 10-11-1891.

<sup>3.</sup> S.J. F.C. 15-6-1892 p 97.

<sup>4.</sup> This point is taken from G.C. Bolton A Thousand Miles Away pp 203-4.

<sup>5.</sup> M.M. 16-2-1892.

<sup>6.</sup> The first Mackay foundry was the Victoria Foundry owned by Wm. Robertson. He was joined by Scottish-West Indies engineer John Dow who supervised construction of most of the early mills at Mackay. It became known as Dow and Robertson and then Robertson and Co. The next to open was that of Cameron, Mackay and Green. Mr. G.M. Cameron finally assumed control and it remained in the family until purchased by Walkers Ltd. in 1949. Foundry advertisements in the 1875 Press include P.N. Russel and Co. Sydney and Brisbane; John Walker and Co. Union Foundry, Maryborough and at Ballarat (John Dow Mackay agent); Vulcan Foundry, R. Hughes and Co. Maryborough.

<sup>7.</sup> M.M. 16-4-1892 (announcement); 20-5-1892 (Governor-in-Council approval and principal provisions).

<sup>8.</sup> M.M. 9-7-1892.

<sup>9.</sup> S.J.T.C. Vol I p 25 15-3-1892.

<sup>10.</sup> M.S. 14-6-1893.

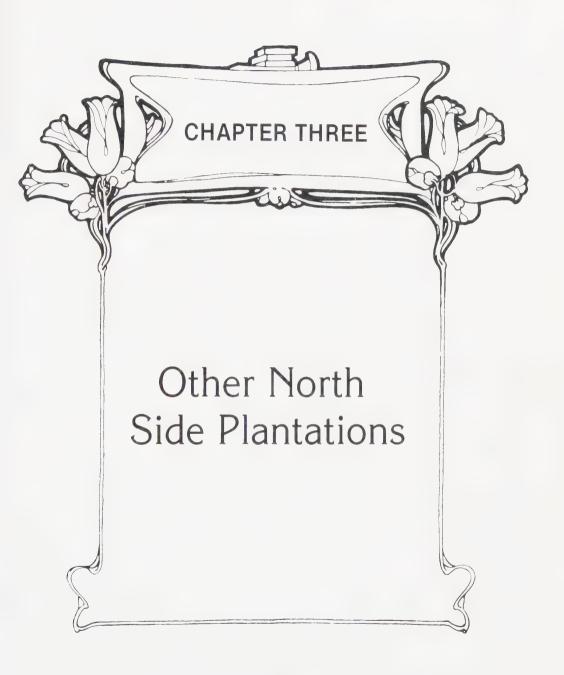
<sup>11.</sup> M.M. 11-2-1893.

<sup>12.</sup> Victoria Mill (near Eton) was built by the Mackay Sugar Co. formed primarily by George Smith in

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1881, to operate as part plantation part Central Mill. Suppliers included: Ironside, Robinson, Kemmis, Antoney, Bosanquet, Draper and Pogson.

- 13. Edward Denman wrote under the pseudonym Canegrower.
- 14. M.S. 21-8-1893; S.J.T.C. 15-9-1893; 15-11-1893.



#### Part sixteen

### PIONEER — ASHBURTON

John Spiller, the Devonshireman, named his last formed Mackay plantation Ashburton from the English town of that name on the Ashburn River in South Devon.

A marked preponderance of Scottish names applies to Farleigh country east of the Norbrook hills — Glenalbyn and Inverness plantations and such pioneering family names as McBryde, Finlayson, Fordyce, McCready, McIntosh, Jamieson, Bell, McGregor and Farquhar, to mention but a few. On the western side, the Farleigh–Ashburton side, a like accumulation of Irish names occurs. Miclere and Michael Carroll were there almost from the beginning. Later came the Corcorans, Mulherins, Hands, Kirwans, Donnellys, Donohues, Kellys, Ryans, O'Riordans and Dunworths, again to mention but a few. Contrary to historical probability not one of these families attributes its presence to John Spiller's recruiting trip to Ireland in early 1881.

The M.P.F.A. membership roll for the 20th November 1882, about a year after McKinnon and Co. took over from Spiller, lists a Mr. McCrae of Pioneer and subsequent minutes record that N.R. Macrae was M.P.F.A. president for 1885–6. The discrepancy in spelling suggests the member was not well known in 1882.

Ashburton was managed by Alexander Downie Cartner. Cartner's sugar industry career had begun in 1869 and he had been in Mackay district at least since the early seventies. He signed a *Mercury* advertisement of 24th April 1873 calling tenders for bricks for the Alexandra giving his address as Mackay. A news item about mid 1878 stated that a Mr. Wilson succeeded Daniel Dupont as a sugar boiler at Te Kowai and Cartner and a Mr. Jepson looked after the plantation work. He was manager on Fitzgerald's ill fated Peri plantation.

The McKinnon and Co. management extended cultivation into the back valleys of Pioneer Estate towards Ashburton and developed a drainage scheme for the heavy dark soils. No realisation on capital was expected until 1883–84. After that, large returns were hoped for.

Ashburton mill was built in 1883-84, supervised by John Dow. The reason for the time lag between Spiller's ordering of the Ashburton plant and its erection, if indeed Spiller's orders were the ones which finally went into Ashburton, is one of many gaps in the story which suggests Ashburton as a rewarding subject of more detailed research. One machinery name plate was dated 1883, suggesting this item at least was ordered after Spiller's original order was made. Conditions for erection of the mill were not easy. It rained for most of February 1884 and for six weeks ploughmen on the North Side did only three half-days work.

The mill machinery was hauled by teams of 18 bullocks, very heavy loads for the Pioneer River bridge at The Hermitage, a long, high and by this time rickety bridge, the site of which C.B. Whish had reported on and building of which, E.J. Welsh had supervised in 1875–76. On Pioneer Estate stood another bridge hazard, over Spiller's

Creek (later called Fursden). Often three or more teams were used to haul wagon loads of machinery out of bogs and the trip from the wharves was likely to take three weeks. Today it is a few minutes by car.

Melanesians and Chinese did much of the new clearing using winch gear which, presumably, Spiller had ordered. Great log fires brightened the nights and smoke hung over the hills for long periods in early 1884, but the wet weather inhibited clean burns and many of the larger stumps, only charred, were dragged away. Fifty years later many of these gnarled and knotted rock solid old boles still survived on spare land.

The heavy wet season and the new clearing gave ploughmen great trouble. Three and six-horse teams frequently sank into the smoothed over stump holes, still sodden underneath when the surface soil seemed fit to plough. At piece work rates of 20/- to 22/6 an acre, ploughmen made good money turning over an acre and a half a day, but like all piece workers they chafed at delays.

A Mr. Stuart was an early (probably the first) overseer. J.T. O'Riordan says ploughmen boosted their earnings by "slumming", that is by leaving loose soil on unploughed runs in such a way as to give the appearance of a fully ploughed strip. Stuart, it appeared, did not correct the practice. He was soon replaced by Thomas Corcoran who immediately disciplined the culprits.<sup>2</sup>

Corcoran seems to have transferred to Ashburton from Foulden or Farleigh and was replaced as overseer at Farleigh by a Mr. Wiseman, who had been overseer at Pioneer. Wiseman was named as acting manager at Farleigh in the *Mercury* of 18th March 1890. This was about the time Lawes had instructed F.W. Bolton to close down his estates if the labour position did not improve so it is likely Bolton was in England at that time. Wiseman later returned to Farleigh as overseer and was a cane inspector in 1905.

J.T. O'Riordan has recorded that A.D. Cartner married Thomas Corcoran's sister. Corcoran later returned to Ireland where he engaged in large scale farming. Joseph Cartner Bowman, who had been at Palms in 1882 became a sugar boiler at Ashburton and then overseer in 1886. Jim Duncan was stable overseer about the same time. O'Riordan describes both Cartner and Corcoran as exemplary employers. Bowman took up Rose Hill at Balnagowan in 1895 and also bought land from H.H. Lee Bryce.

J.T. O'Riordan was a fine example of the type of yeoman farmer S.W. Griffith hoped to establish as the backbone of the sugar industry. He was proud of the fact that he was the first of the plantation ploughmen to supply cane of his own to Farleigh. He worked a farm at Miclere for seven years and then shifted to Dumbleton. His memoirs are thoughtful and perceptive. He was P.R.F.G.A. president in 1909 when the A.S.P.A. and that body amalgamated. He deplored the split which occurred in 1912 and the inter-organisation arguments which followed.

He had migrated to Australia in 1883. He left Cork harbour in January in the British India steamer *Chybassa*, with his sister Mary (later Mrs. Patrick Dunworth) and a Mr. and Mrs. Challen. They had a work agreement with E.V. Reid of Fryerne. They arrived at Mackay on 10th March 1883. The most uncomfortable part of the whole trip was at Flat Top where they waited seven hours in the tender *Manly* for the right tide.

Patrick Dunworth had landed in Sydney in 1880 and came to Mackay the following year. He worked at Palms and Peri and then for a long period at Foulden under F.W. Bolton. He and his wife retired to Grange Hill farm. J.T. O'Riordan retired in 1929 having never left Mackay — it was the best place in the world, he said. His Ashburton

and River Estate recollections come from his original diaries which have been destroyed.

Ashburton mill became renowned for its appetite for boiler wood. Philip Kirwan says this was because Cartner interfered with the boiler plans when engineer John Dow was supervising construction. "When a wood shortage became imminent", writes Kirwan, "all the ploughmen and as many Kanakas as could be spared, were sent cutting and gathering firewood".

The mill engineer was William Lyle who later took charge of the assembly of machinery at North Eton Central Mill. He was manager and engineer at North Eton at the time of the Royal Commission in February 1889. He then seems to have left the district but returned to become chief engineer at Habana, probably early in 1892. He was manager of Proserpine Central Mill when the mill opening was celebrated on 21st September 1897.

Kirwan also relates that McKinnon and Co. bought Morley's paddock, on which a pioneer family had run cattle. This comprised about a square mile of hills and flats and gave the mill a large proportion of its cane. The "paddock" comprised Portions 31 and 32, Parish of Bassett and lay to the north of Coningsby Plantation. Contour markings on the hillsides about this area, although fading, can still be observed from the Bruce Highway (in 1982), indicating the old dray tracks, headlands and sidelings of hill-scrub cane paddocks.

McKinnon and Co. have the distinction of having made the first direct shipment of Queensland sugar to London. This was a consignment of  $9\frac{1}{2}$  tons, in the steamer *Mekara* in 1885 and listed as having come from Pioneer Plantation at Mackay. This was probably the last significant event in the history of Pioneer before the mill was dismantled and vital components transferred to Ashburton.

The year of the transfer, probably 1886, must remain for discovery in future research. Pioneer's crusher became the Ashburton No. 2 mill. With 4 ft. 6 in. rollers it served as a better auxiliary than the smaller Foulden rollers proved at Farleigh. Unlike Farleigh, Ashburton was able to tap underground water on the mill site. At least five wells were put down. They were lined with alternate bands of brick and timber and at the 20 ft. level were interconnected with substantial pipes. One still survives and is still used for irrigation by Farleigh director Mr. Charles Zahra, who owns the farm at the site.

Ashburton was larger than Farleigh though it did not attract the same public curiosity. In the eighties, plantations to survive had to be relatively very large, like Homebush or the Melbourne Mackay Sugar Co.; or well backed financially, like Farleigh; or with reasonable overheads like the central mills then had. McKinnon and Co. did not survive the slump which began in 1884. In February 1889 the Bank of Australasia had taken over the mill and part of the estates. In the records of the 1889 Royal Commission, McKinnon and Co. were listed as owners of Pioneer, from which cane was supplied to Ashburton, but the estate is listed with no mill.

The total area was 4,800 acres; 1,740 were cultivated and 1,000 acres had been harvested in 1888 to make 360 tons of sugar and 11,000 gallons of molasses; £200,000 were invested; machinery plus erection costs had totalled £40,000. In 1888 losses had been grievous. The sugar make had returned £8,000 while working expenses had totalled £13,592. The workforce comprised 47 Europeans, three Chinese, five Javanese and 220 Melanesians.<sup>6</sup>

The Ashburton figures demonstrate the planters' dilemma on labour. Cartner grossed better than £20 a ton for his 360 tons of sugar and showed a loss of £5,592. He had a 1,000 ton capacity mill which at £20 a ton would gross £20,000. Working expenses for this throughput would not greatly have exceeded the basic £13,592, leaving plenty of margin for the £4 a ton profit then deemed necessary to keep a plantation viable. Frederick Bolton was obviously right when he said the planters could cope with low prices if they had the right labour (and of course reasonable seasons) to maintain throughput. The general problem was aggravated by light crops. Ashburton's crop averaged only 15 tons per acre when Farleigh took over in 1895. This was a consistent figure. In 1893 Ashburton had 1,500 acres under cane (mostly Rose Bamboo) averaging about 15 tons per acre.

Since plant crops and hillside scrub canes were much heavier, ratoons on the flats would have been very light indeed and so contributed largely to high unit field costs.

Soon, by amalgamation with Farleigh, Ashburton was to fit into a business pattern and physical layout which would be the basis of modern Farleigh.

<sup>1.</sup> M.M. 1-7-1882.

<sup>2.</sup> Prime source of information for much of this Part is J.T. O'Riordan's *Pioneer* articles D.M. late 1931 and early 1932.

<sup>3.</sup> E.V. Reid was local manager of the Union Bank of Australia Ltd., later a member of the firm of Walter Reid and Co., of Rockhampton and later still general manager of Dalgety and Co. in London.

<sup>4.</sup> Memoirs by courtesy M.D.C.G.E.

<sup>5.</sup> S.J.T.C. Feb. 1892 p 9.

<sup>6.</sup> Cartner's evidence to 1889 Royal Commission.

<sup>7.</sup> M.M. 7-3-1893.

#### Part seventeen

# RIVER ESTATE

Andrew Henderson who later owned Beaconsfield, first worked River Estate lands. John Mackay called him, James Ready and Edward Cridland, fathers of the hamlet of Port Mackay. Henderson, a nephew of shipping and rural property magnate, Sir William Henderson, had been overseer of Newstead station when he heard of John Mackay's port discovery and he immediately arranged with a group of sheep men to set up a depot. He was managing partner at River Estate in 1871 when the property was sold to G.N. Marten and E.M. Long. The identity of his partner is uncertain. About that time Michael Carroll (of Miclere) claimed ownership of some of the lands but this was in dispute.

It is appropriate here to revert to Spiller's sale of Branscombe to Maurice Lyons. On 26th July 1870, Lyons transferred the estate to John Sargent Turner, described as "Manager for the time being of the Union Bank of Australia at Brisbane". On 12th December 1872, application was made to transfer Branscombe to George Nisbet Marten and Edward Maitland Long of Mackay. The transfer was approved and recorded on the lease on 3rd January 1873. Marten and Long were issued a deed of grant for both selections in February 1873, "having paid the balance of the ten years' rents, together with the Deed Fee, making the land freehold property".

The pair were reported in the *Mercury*, as early as 1st August 1870, to be planning a mill and distillery there for 1871. The estate had 160 acres under cane.

Within the next year or two, Marten dropped out of the partnership and River Estate was operated by a partnership of the three Long brothers, Edward Maitland, William Houston and George, first known as Long Brothers and later Long and Co. The business story of this change seems likely to have been connected with either the disappearance of George Long with *Petrel* in 1873 or the assumption of managership by the A.J.S. Bank in 1876.

River Estate mill, erected under the supervision of engineer John Dow first crushed in the last week of September 1873. Excitement had attended the arrival of the mill machinery. The first shipment — 90 tons — came in the *Hannah Newton* from Sydney in June 1873 and the remaining 100 tons followed in the *Fanny Campbell*. On the way up from Sydney, towards the end of June, the latter ship ran into bad weather and three large boilers on the deck threatened to break loose. The plant at that time was said to be the largest imported to Queensland and certainly the largest so far to come to Mackay. E.M. Long was heavily committed in 1875 when rust struck, with Branscombe developing and a big mill at River Estate requiring a big plantation to feed it.

The potential for trouble seems to have been there from the start for Edward Denman has recorded that rust showed up in River Estate in 1873. Spiller's first connection in 1876 seems to have been as manager for the A.J.S. Bank while the estate was in receivership. Spiller maintained it as a going concern.

A fine sugar sample was displayed in town in 1877, made by the Icery monosulphite process under supervision of Louis Duval. From mixed varieties, it was "brilliantly white, of good grain, superior to sugar made at the same mill by the ordinary lime process". The 1,200 acre estate employed and had ample accommodation for 140 Melanesians and 50 Europeans; 500 acres of cane were cultivated with 280 acres available for 1877. The crop was greater than the mill could handle. Varieties planted were Gingham, Big Yellow, Caledonian, Ribbon, Otamatie, Meera, Rose Bambow, Malabar, Djong Djong, Treboc, Diard and Rhappoe. The first six formed the main part of the crop. Meera and Otamatie returned three tons of sugar per acre; one 2½ acre patch of Otamatie yielded nine tons of sugar.

This was the beginning of River Estate's brief golden age. The Otamatic yield emphasises the ensuing steep decline in the productivity of North Side soils; a decade later these lands did well to give 15 tons of cane and one ton of sugar per acre.

In 1877 the total sugar make was about 600 tons. An October estimate put the tonnage expected from purchased cane at 150 to 200 but this would vary according to the length of the season. Spiller was in overall control. Donald McDonald had general control of the estate and J.M. Costello control of the crop. Richard Dempsey Dunne was in charge of the mill for that season. Years later he recalled that he would supervise the loading of wagons with sugar for John Rolleston who took out two loads a day to the wharves.

Enlightened as Spiller was in the matter of taking cane from small growers the security of such suppliers obviously depended on the capacity of the mill to handle the whole available crop. Here they were well served. The mill was among the best in the district until the new heavy mills with their 5 ft. 6 in. rollers were built in the early eighties. The *Mercury* said, "The machinery is acknowledged to be the most perfect in the colony".

The rollers, 4 ft. 6 ins. by 26 inches, from Mirlees, Tait and Watson of Glasgow, were fed by a self acting cane carrier 40 ft. long and driven by a 50 h.p. horizontal steam engine. One tubular boiler, 12 ft. x 7 ft., developed 50 h.p. and one Cornish boiler 20 ft. by 7 ft. developed 55 h.p. A double acting water pump with a 13 in. bore and a 12 in. stroke was attached to a 12 h.p. vertical steam engine. An elevator 35 ft. long raised the megas 18 ft. to a chute which carried it clear of the building.

An 18 in. diameter pump forced juice up to six clarifiers each holding 600 gallons. These were fitted with trunnions and double sets of copper steam tubes fitted with condensed water boxes and which could be heated by direct or exhaust steam.

The sugar recovery plant included: two cast iron double furnace batteries, each fitted with a copper dipper and crane; five cast iron subsiders with a capacity of 12 gallons each and a 6 ft. 6 in. copper vacuum pan. Auxiliary to the pan was an air pump with a 16 in. bore and 24 in. stroke. Two receiving tanks from the vacuum pan had respective capacities of 1,200 and 400 gallons. Two pairs of 30 in. centrifugals operated. One was Weston's patent "suspended" and the other a Manlove and Alliott "underdriven".

Four large cast iron sugar tanks had a total capacity of 14,000 gallons. There also were nine cast iron coolers, two large cold water cisterns and two wells supplying unlimited water. The crushing rollers delivered 800 gallons of juice an hour, a rate within the capacity of the rest of the mill. The vacuum pan and fugals could produce 10 tons of sugar in 24 hours.

Richard Dempsey Dunne was in charge of general mill work, Henry Braby was engineer and J.T. Fallap sugar boiler. Fallap had been criticised for his championship of the then controversial Icery process — "undeserved odium in connection with certain experiments", the *Mercury* said; but C.B. de Lissa had by then declared himself happy with River Estate and the *Mercury* sealed the argument: "When it is known that Mr. Spiller had personally superintended the cultivation of the estate it will be readily understood adverse criticism is an impossibility".

The Spiller-Brandon-A.J.S. enterprise extended the estate by more than 1400 acres. The area of 2,625 acres which it reached under Spiller remained the same for many years after he left.

Philip Kirwan has described the estate's geographical extent: "— from the (Pioneer) river bank to the road leading to Glendaragh and separating Inverness and River Estate. At first the estate finished at the road to Farleigh past the Hill End Hotel". (The hotel site is best identified as Glenella township.) Kirwan adds: "They (meaning Spiller and Brandon) bought out Glenalbyn which ran from James Wales' selection to the Glendaragh road. They then bought Mark Kelly's selection, which brought them to the boundaries of Beaconsfield. What was known as (Spiller's) Back River Estate was first acquired by James Wales at a ballot for selection".

River Estate's period of ascendancy ended when Spiller and Brandon sold. According to contemporary Mackay solicitor Frank Smith, Messrs. McKinnon and Ronald were owners at different times. Coming from a local solicitor, Smith's mention of McKinnon and Co. is significant.<sup>5</sup>

George Smith seems to have handled the sale, since Frank Smith names McKinnon as one of the Victorian capitalists George Smith induced to invest in Mackay. McKinnon's interest seems not to have extended to ownership for R.B. Ronald is always remembered and seems to have been documented as the owner who followed Spiller. William Archer (junior) took over management of the estate in mid-1883. M.P.F.A. minutes show he was proposed for membership on 16th August 1883. Archer is included in a group photograph of George Smith's family reproduced in the *Daily Mercury* Jubilee Edition 1912.6

The River Estate lands were able to over-supply the mill's single set of rollers. Obviously too, the "back end" was capable of handling more juice than the crushing unit could deliver. A juice mill therefore was built at the northern end of the estate. Correspondent "Jethro Tull" in *The Queenslander* in May 1883 told of steep, stony, black soil, forest hills being successfully cultivated, "on the well managed River Estate".

River Estate North was Mackay's only juice mill. The juice was brought to the larger factory by tramway. Portion of the route most likely to have been used can be traced from an easement passing through Portion 125, Bassett. The year of the juice mill's first crushing has been put as early as 1881. Philip Kirwan gives this date, though it is difficult to substantiate. Spiller, with his mastery of factory techniques, aware of the drawbacks of hauling cane long distances and with at least a season's experience of steam loco haulage, must have decided that juice was more easily hauled to his main factory than cane.

Philip Kirwan supplies other details which stand up to cross checking: "River Estate had a tramline from near the Inverness boundary to the (Pioneer) river bank. In 1883 they used portable line, a light handy Decauville, much easier to handle than the

heavier German type used later. Loco traction failed them as it did with Habana. Horses did the hauling on River Estate tramways". The 3 ft. 6 in. gauge Fowler "Emma Ruth" proved to be ahead of her time without a man like Spiller with the capacity to make such innovations work.

The first of a series of setbacks occurred in 1884 when a Pioneer River flood eroded the bank adjacent to the mill and made a deep cut back to Firefly Creek. It washed out the brick bed of the boilers and made a large hole under the stack. Water inundated the mill grounds and Kanakas lashed down what moveable gear they could. Two were drowned. All drays were washed away and many of them never found. There could have been up to two dozen of them packed in rows in the mill yard. The damaged mill struggled on for the next three seasons, the management deriving small comfort from the fact that poor crops in two of them reduced the load on the plant.

The new owners lacked experience in large degree but they were not short of capital, nor courage, and early in 1887 a fine new factory began to take shape on the left of the road to Hill End (travelling outward from Mackay). It stood on the left bank of Fursden Creek about three quarters of a mile from the river bank site, roughly halving the distance to the juice mill.

Sometime between the 1884 flood and the end of 1886, the juice mill was closed down and combined with the old mill to form a double crusher. It was widely believed later that the juice mill operated until the new mill opened in 1887. Some kind of sustained activity continued to take place which involved the juice mill site.

Cane from The Cedars went to River Estate after The Cedars closed in 1885. Perhaps it was crushed at the juice mill. Crops were harvested at The Cedars for a year or two after that mill closed. It seems likely the juice mill was dismantled in this period so perhaps the mill yards were still active as a tram truck marshalling centre. Probably the mill building was used as a centre of plantation operations, in the way Pioneer became an outpost, after Ashburton began to receive its crops.

Another erroneous belief was that the old River Estate 4 ft. 6 in. rollers were combined with those from the juice mill to equip the new mill. The new mill started up with a pair of double crushers which were still considered "new" at the turn of the century. At some stage in the meantime the old stack had to be demolished. The wreckers' plans went astray and portion of the top collapsed on the mill building, seriously damaging plant.

The new mill was a worthy replacement. J.T. O'Riordan recalled: "The pan stage was erected without a nail or a bolt and so inlaid that the weight of the pan kept the structure in place", then, "a nice varnish finish" was given to the work. A large vacuum pan and triple effets came from England, the latter to replace the old open batteries. An improved sulphurous acid process new to the district was used. Dilute acid was injected in preference to the commonly used method of injecting acid fumes.

Automatic delivery of megas to the boiler furnaces was a common feature of the improved mills of the eighties. River Estate passed its megas through portion of the chimney flue on the way to the furnace thus saving the fuel normally used in drying. The first megas carrier was a vast improvement on Farleigh's compromise unit, having been enclosed to aid retention of steam. The mill was again one of the best in the colony and Mackay district was rated fortunate in having a plantation owner willing to expend such a large amount of money.8

The new mill crushed for only five seasons. William Archer told the 1889 Royal

Commission the estate in 1888 returned no interest and not half of its working expenses of £15,000; 844 acres (plus seven from farmers) were cut to make 450 tons of sugar, a cane yield of something less than 10 tons per acre. Of the total 2,625 acres, 1,500 were cleared for cane. One Islander was employed for each  $8\frac{1}{2}$  acres cultivated. Investment in the estate totalled £129,685. Buildings cost £10,000 and machinery £19,875. The latter came from Mirlees, Tait and Co., Glasgow, N. and W. Smith, Glasgow and Geo. Fletcher and Co., London and Glasgow.

In 1890 George Smith compiled a list of Mackay district sugar mills with the value the Government could be expected to pay should local efforts result in the Government acquiring one of them as a central mill. He valued River Estate at £100,000.9

The new mill made only 4,000 tons of sugar in five years — 800 tons in 1891. It had a seasonal capacity for 3,000 tons. The Mercury had firm views on its closure: "The fate of River Estate will be the fate of every mill owner who fails to adapt to the changing conditions of affairs in Queensland. The story is easily told. A manager with no previous sugar experience, but beset on acquiring the requisite knowledge, active, painstaking — likely to make a success — on his arrival fell into wrong hands and became imbued with the pernicious doctrine of the leading planters". (The Mercury had been critical of the leading planters for not following Long's lead and the C.S.R. Co.'s example in cutting up the estates.) "Farmers, who had been the mainstay of the mill, it was decided to discourage. The price paid to them was therefore reduced to 9/a ton at the rollers. Many farms stopped producing and cane from others went elsewhere. In 1886 the mill crushed more than 10,000 tons from 23 growers. In 1890 the farmers supplied 100 tons." Racecourse Central Mill across the river was willing to offer a better price and was chasing cane. Thus wrote editor Tom Chataway in the paper partly owned by W.G. Hodges who had played a leading role in giving Oueensland its first two central mills.10

Other reasons given for the closure were capital debt and overworked land. Ronald, then living in England, was a wealthy man and he decided to cut his losses.

The fine performance of the old mill soon faded from memory. "Ever since some £40,000 was given for the estate and its old ramshackle mill, the estate has been losing money", said the *Mercury* on 3rd November 1891. The new mill was then said to be valued at £30,000. Two years later the whole estate was still on the market, the negotiable price said to have been around £16,000.

Edward Denman took the opportunity to hammer at the plantation system with a cane price argument: "River Estate was at one time the central factory in the district. It made 2,000 tons (of sugar) chiefly grown by farmers. Under the new proprietory it essayed to grow its own cane with a result generally known. Some time before it closed it offered farmers 12/- (a ton) to supply, but to a man they declined"."

R.B. Ronald had extensive southern pastoral interests from which came fine blood stock which, for the beneficial effect they had on local blood lines, probably provided his most lasting contribution to the district welfare.

Local family names associated with River Estate history are numerous. In such a list Levi Wills could not be left out. He landed at Keppel Bay from the *Light Brigade* on 1st April 1873. He worked for the brothers William and Mark Christian at Wilangi station, then for Michael Carroll at Miclere and later for Spiller at Pioneer. He was overseer at old River Estate and when the Ronald estate closed down purchased the whole of the standing crop and sold it to other mills. He subsequently settled on a

River Estate farm. One of his daughters married Harry Wright who had arrived on the *Jumna* from England in 1888.

The idle mill and its derelict fields occasionally beckoned to the hopeful. Early in 1895 two Mackay Commission Agents, H. Black and G.H. Crompton offered both River Estate and Beaconsfield mills and plantations as security, in conjunction with Dumbleton and other adjacent farm lands, for debentures under the Sugar Works Guarantee Act of 1893.<sup>12</sup>

A company was formed to operate a co-operative central mill and planting of 300 acres promised forthwith. Cultivation was immediately possible on 1500 acres as soon as subdivisions were made; 6,000 arable acres were available and a sugar output of 2,500 tons was expected. River Estate connections throughout its history were nothing if not optimists.

Despite the quality of the machinery the new company found certain weaknesses in the plant. One mill engine was "left handed" and the other right, causing a bulky layout. Boilers needed resetting closer to the work and the roof needed strengthening. Nevertheless the plant was relatively modern and was claimed to be more suited to a central mill project than the one being negotiated at Pleystowe where the machinery was old.

The directors of the new company reckoned without that hardy old survivor, E.M. Long. He had gained a major interest in the original Pleystowe plantation lands in a business association with William Steedman, who had been manager for the Victorian based Pleystowe Sugar Company, which took over from Hewitt and Romilly. (Romilly's interest may have ceased before that takeover). After the Pleystowe company closed following the 1888 drought, Steedman had secured lease of the land and much of the cane went to Racecourse. Long also teamed up with another hardy old survivor, John Cook, of Balnagowan. Their lands were offered as security and Long won approval under the 1893 S.W.G.A. to reopen Pleystowe as a Central Mill. River Estate again lanquished.<sup>13</sup>

Racecourse bought the weighbridge about June 1898 but sugar industry investment was then almost stagnant and there was no demand for plant, even of the quality River Estate had to offer.

In 1902 Major A.J. Boyd of Nundah (Brisbane), a southern sugar pioneer and principal of a company which planned to put up a mill at Nerang Creek, inspected River Estate and other idle mills. He was reported to have made an offer but the Nerang project never went ahead. Finally several items of plant went to the new mill at Cattle Creek (the last mill to be built in Mackay district) which began operations in 1906.<sup>14</sup>

After cyclone Eline in 1898 part of the stack of the first mill lay in what had virtually become the Pioneer River bed, near Foulden township, until 1958. In that year a bad flood wrecked a temporary railway bridge at Mirani and damaged the recently completed Marian Weir. When the flood receded, the old stack had been buried where the waters had scoured a hole around it and then covered it with sand.

After the 1958 flood, which severely damaged Foulden township, a striking example of the build up of silt over the years was noticed. A wrecked fence was found to have been built over a completely covered earlier fence. On further digging an even older fence was found on a level about three feet lower than the second one.

- 1. M.M. obituary 22 10-1892.
- 2. Branscombe details courtesy Q.S.A.
- 3. M.M. 31-10-1877.
- 4. P. Kirwan *Memoirs* courtesy M.D.C.G.E.; James Wales was farming this selection in 1887. An M.S. advertisement of 11-7-1887 sought contract cane carters.
- 5. D.M. Jubilee Edition August 1912 p 20.
- 6. Evidence to 1889 Royal Commission.
- 7. This is confirmed by J.T. O'Riordan and Ole Matsen.
- 8. M.M. 2-4 1887; M.S. October 1887.
- 9. S.I.Q. p 85; A.S.J. 4-12-1930 p 559.
- 10. M.M. 4-12-1890.
- 11. M.M. 18-3-1893.
- 12. M.M. 12-2-1895.
- 13. At Mackay, Marian also reopened as a Central Mill and resumed crushing in 1895. Plane Creek was constituted under the 1893 Act and crushed its first crop in 1896. See also Part thirty "Habana".
- 14. S.J.T.C. 15-7 1902 p 102.

### Part eighteen

# **DUMBLETON**

### Lloyd and Walker

Alfred Hart Lloyd was one of the first selectors to break up ground on the North Side. As recorded in Part 3 he had 10 acres ploughed on his river bank selection in September 1866 when Spiller, just down stream, had 25 acres turned over. Lloyd at that time was not working his North Side block faster than selection conditions dictated and it is likely Spiller ploughed the first few acres for him.

Lloyd owned Blue Mountain run. He was out there in the second week in September when a pursuit group from Mackay reached the property searching for the two men who robbed the A.J.S. Bank on 12th September 1866. On the same day, 13th September 1866, that T.H. Fitzgerald wrote to Lands Minister Ball reporting on progress on Lloyd's and Spiller's and other selections, A.J.S. manager George Geddes was writing his account of the robbery. The pursuit "posse" had probably changed personnel by the time it got to Blue Mountain but when it left Mackay it comprised the local Police sergeant, Mr. Green (the bank's teller), a Mr. Frazer and *Mercury* proprietor and editor W.O. Hodgkinson. They were joined by J.C. Binney at Dan



Dumbleton Plantation Mill. Photo: John Oxley Library.

Conner's residence, Landsdowne, about two and a half miles along the road out of town.<sup>1</sup>

According to veteran Nebo district cattleman James Perry, Lloyd was known as "Greenhide" Lloyd because of the very large amount of this material he used in his harness and personal belongings.

In the next 18 months Lloyd had not done much to his Mackay block. When A.G. Muller first visited Pioneer Estate with Charles Walker he noted that Spiller had cleared some of Lloyd's ground and planted it with maize. This arrangement no doubt helped Lloyd with his selection conditions and gave Spiller a much needed cash crop.

Charles Walker's connection with the district had begun earlier. He was married at Drayton in 1861 and soon afterwards became manager of Cotherstone, the head station of Mr. J. Thorne, a shearing and lambing station in the Clermont area. He was then 23-years-old. Ling Roth gives the run's location: "20 miles from Mr. Henry's Arthur Downs, 35 miles from Gordon Downs and 35 miles from Retro Creek". Burnett's station (formerly Stuart's) on Peak Downs was 25 miles from Cotherstone and 35 miles from McLaren's and McDonald's Logan Downs.<sup>2</sup>

Life at Cotherstone was not uneventful as indicated by an experience of G.M. Hess, who worked in the region for five years and who was on Cotherstone in 1867. "The stampede of horses and cattle generally heralded the approach of the blacks and on several occasions Mr. Hess had trouble recovering his bullocks, during which time the men had to be on the lookout for blacks. Several men were killed at Suttor and also at Cotherstone. One night blacks followed Mr. Hess and his party for over three miles but did not attack and the following morning the same tribe killed two men at Cotherstone and butchered 500 sheep. Mr. Hess and Mr. Walker had a conference and messages were sent to the stations to place all hands in possession of firearms."

A.G. Muller arrived in Brisbane from Hamburg in May 1864 in the sailing ship

Johen Cassar after a voyage lasting nearly six months. It was in stark contrast to the enjoyable passage of John and Mary O'Riordan from Cork in the previous year. One "storm" lasted a fortnight and the first landmark sighted after leaving Hamburg in November 1863 was the Moreton Bay lighthouse. Even then the wind blew them off course and it was another two weeks before they landed in Brisbane.

A.G. Muller was a blacksmith. He worked on Peak Downs stations for five years and was on Cotherstone when Charles Walker decided to take up a North Side block. Muller elected to come with the family. The Walkers then had at least one small child of their family of five daughters and four boys.

They stayed at Charles Keeley's Golden Fleece Hotel. (This later became Northey's Oriental and is named as Oriental in A.G. Muller's diary). Keeley accompanied Walker on an inspection of the new block. They crossed the river near the present site of St. Patrick's church. Jack Barnes, on his 12 acres just opposite the township (always known since as Cremorne), and John Spiller were the only resident selectors. Walker decided his block was too remote, an indication of the extent of North Side agricultural selections between the time of Fitzgerald's surveys of 1864–65 and the erection of Spiller's wooden mill in 1868.

Spiller gave Walker details of Lloyd's block and told him Lloyd was due in "town" in a few days. He suggested Walker meet him. There was in fact little likelihood of Walker missing Lloyd given the size of the township, and Lloyd owned property in "town".

The pair apparently agreed on a partnership forthwith, for Walker decided to camp on the block immediately. He bought supplies from B. Broadnitz in Sydney Street and set out for Lloyd's selection. "We went to Wallingford", Muller wrote, "crossed the river at Bowen crossing, then through Balhagowan and Nebia, as yet unformed. We pitched the tent at the foot of a hill and Mr. Walker named the place Dumbleton". This was the name of his home town in Gloucestershire, England. They started immediately on a dwelling place. John Cook came down from Balhagowan and advised them to use milkwood for slabs. Muller helped set up Dumbleton and A.H. Lloyd came down from Blue Mountain with bullocks for ploughing. This was the real

Early Homestead - Dumbleton. Photo: John Oxley Library.



beginning of the plantation. Walker then gave Muller the chance to work for Spiller and the two parted on very good terms.

Lloyd later sold Blue Mountain. An advertisement appeared in the *Mercury* of 11th November 1876: "partnership hitherto existing between the undersigned, trading under the name and style of Rice, Rawson and Co. as graziers at Mt. Spencer, Hazlewood, Blue Mountain and The Hollow, dissolved by mutual consent. Signed: Lionel K. Rice, Christopher Turner (by his attorney Robt. Little), Henry S. Finch Hatton, Charles C. Rawson, Lancelot B. Rawson, Edmund S. Rawson, 1st July 1876.

Dumbleton worked as a plantation from 1871 to 1887. The mill first crushed late in 1872, the 1871 crop having been crushed by Spiller. The machinery was brought up the river by boat. Philip Kirwan says an original steel stack was later replaced with brick. The mill was, to borrow Edward Denman's description of Dulverton, "a plain and uncomplicated affair", from John Walker of Maryborough, costing £2,000.

In March 1873, 120 acres were under cane and it was not expected the area would increase in 1874; 1872 production was 35 tons of sugar from 35 acres of cane, with 4,000 gallons of molasses. Its turnover therefore in its second year with the plantation producing well below its capacity was in the order of £1,250 or more than half the capital cost of the mill — a very good result.

Dumbleton did not figure in any spectacular technological achievement, apart from the occasional show prize which could be expected from a competent planter; but in the seventies, while high prices offset the inefficiencies of the early mills the partners were recognised as efficient and financially successful planters.

A *Mercury* advertisement of 2nd December 1876 indicates a judicious shuffling of real estate assets. Lloyd and Walker applied for conditional selections 98 and 130. Walker had applied for 98 in October 1869 and Lloyd for 130 in November 1869. On 18th January 1877, both were transferred to R.J. Jeffray. Subsequently, the main Dumbleton estate lands, Pors. 37–46 (747 acres) were transferred to Jeffray.

Dumbleton's sugar lands peaked at 400 acres and at the time of their closure in 1887 employed 70 Islanders and 20 white men, a low proportion of Islanders. Lloyd rated cost and difficulty in securing Islanders as an equal hazard with low sugar prices.

The mill's production record was in the 250–400 tons range. In 1877 it made 300 tons, with a round teache battery (for boiling juice) and Wetzel pan. As would be expected the owners were ready to try new techniques and one of the sulphur recovery processes was used in addition to the basic liming.

Philip Kirwan, who seems to mix Norwood and Norbrook, says Lloyd and Walker hauled cane seven miles to Dumbleton. They also had cane crushed by Carroll and Avery at Miclere. The inconvenience caused by Miclere closure in 1881 may have made

Farleigh's offer to buy Norbrook more tempting in 1883.

The homestead was double storied with a detached domestic and kitchen block. Timber from Norbrook was used in Dumbleton buildings. This stand of timber extended from Majuba Hill and the northern Miclere boundary, across Jane's Creek flats, into what became known as the Farleigh Scrubs and on towards River Estate North. It extended northwards along the Norbrook Hills in the general locality of a Norbrook Estate farm now (1983) owned by Farleigh's deputy chairman of directors, A.J. Noonan, and thence towards The Cedars.<sup>7</sup>

The partners' comparative prosperity came from a combination of good husbandry applied to grazing and livestock, maize and sugar and partly speculative extension of

their holdings. A.H. Lloyd obviously saw no point in persisting with his small mill against the bad conditions of the eighties and had closed even before the 1888 drought. The estate's cultivation was by then greatly contracted. In February 1889 Lloyd had no cane and only five acres under maize. The plantation lands had by then expanded to 1,180 acres and Dumbleton had a good name for quality horses and top class bullocks.

A *Mercury* item of 28th December 1872, highlights a crop hazard the early planters took seriously. Lloyd and Walker had prosecuted one R. Knox "for damaging £40 worth of sugar cane". It was not uncommon for cane paddocks to be ravaged as stock owners foraged for green feed. Probably the worst affected of all the plantations was William Hyne's and partners' Balmoral which, excepting James Robb's tiny affair at the Lagoons was the only plantation growing cane inside the town limits. Islanders also caused a certain amount of damage by breaking off canes to chew but the planters partly resolved this problem by planting or encouraging stands of soft chewing canes.

Charles Walker was drowned in the Pioneer River near the estate in 1880. He had planned to take his family to town for a theatrical performance. He took a short cut to the homestead and was caught in the stream.

Mrs. Walker sold her interest and made her home on a 20 acre block among the near city North Side hills close to Mt. Pleasant, which she called Cotherstone. Old district families remembered her well long after she died in 1913. "Her hospitality was proverbial", says one printed recollection of an era in which it was customary for local hostesses to advise through the personal columns of the Press the days on which they would be "at home"; "Mrs. Walker practically kept open house and was a most popular hostess".

A.H. Lloyd was an active M.P.F.A. member, a Pioneer Divisional Board member for 11 years (1884–95) and was one of the 31 original shareholders in the Marian Central Mill Company, which first crushed in 1895. He indicated he had 140 acres of caneland to offer as his contribution of the freehold security put up to attract a Government loan for Marian.

He left the district soon afterwards. He had stood to gain a lot from Crompton's and Black's proposed central mill area from Dumbleton across to Beaconsfield, planned to supply River Estate. James Croker was handling much of the land to be subdivided on Dumbleton when E.M. Long stifled the River Estate project with his new Pleystowe company. Dumbleton dismemberment went ahead in the early years of the Buss and Cran ownership of Farleigh after 1902.

Odd bits of steel lay about the mill site for many years and in the late 1960's proved a hazard to mechanical harvesting. A boiler was used during World War II as an air raid shelter on an across-river farm, by Mr. C.R. Gill managing partner in the farm with J.A. Michelmore.

<sup>1.</sup> D.M. Jubilee Edition 12-8-1912.

<sup>2.</sup> A.G. Muller's diaries D.M. Feb. 1932; Port Mackay by H. Ling Roth.

<sup>3.</sup> D.M. Jubilee Edition 12-8-1912.

<sup>4.</sup> A.G. Muller's diaries.

<sup>5.</sup> Lloyd's evidence 1889 Royal Commission; T.S.F.M. p 29 additional details P.P. pp 48-49.

<sup>6.</sup> Q.S.A. Mackay selection register; Q.S.A. Map J/52 1914.

<sup>7.</sup> T.S.F.M. p 29; other details P.P. p 48.

#### Part nineteen

# **INVERNESS**

James Macdonald applied to select Selection 151 Bassett (640 acres) on 11th July 1870. He lived there for two years, expended "a sum equal to ten shillings and more per acre thereon in good and substantial improvements" and as a result freeholded the land on 24th February 1872.

There appear to be no details of any association after that of James with Inverness. The Macdonald Brothers of Inverness are remembered as having been Donald and Alexander; Donald was the principal partner. Alexander was "Polynesian" inspector A.R. Macdonald, who had a rare ability for understanding and reconciling the respective positions of planters, Government and Islanders, and earned the high regard of each. Donald and his descendents spelled their name McDonald.

Donald was Spiller's energetic field officer on River Estate. He has recorded that he set up Inverness in 1872, i.e. the year it was freeholded. He had learned about sugar in Trinidad and arrived in Queensland in the early sixties. He made the first 30 tons of sugar manufactured in Queensland, on Louis Hope's Ormiston plantation. He supervised the third mill built on the Mary River and one at Eaton Vale. He said he took off the first crop for sugar at Millbank, Bundaberg. His first employment at Mackay was with Spiller.<sup>2</sup>

The brothers' mill, from Smellie and Co., Brisbane, arrived in the vessel *Agnes* about the last week in May 1873 — a set of rollers 2 ft. 6 in. wide by 20 inches (or perhaps 21 inches) in diameter, a 12 h.p. engine to drive them and open pans for sugar boiling. The new mill worked in 1873, but not very satisfactorily and in 1874 Edward Denman was asked to take control, at a remuneration of 7/– a ton for cane treated, plus a bonus. Rust in 1875 ran the estate into insolvency and Denman received 1/7 a ton which amounted to 2/7 in the £1.3

(Donald McDonald's son, D.E. McDonald established a building and builders' supplies business in Wood St., Mackay. D.E. McDonald's son, Archie, was a well known builder for more than 30 years from the 1920's. His son, Stuart, of Mackay, is a principal of the national hardware organisation Mitre 10.)

Donald turned to dairying at Auchnacroish in the Ashburton area where he had applied for 160 acres (Selection 605) on 3rd November 1879. It was freeholded in March 1885. He grew rice and led moves to form a rice growers' co-operative. He was a prominent member of the Pioneer River Farmers' Association in the early nineties and before that had led early attempts to establish a central mill. In 1879, 50 men attended a meeting to discuss his proposal to raise £250,000 for a mill. The *Mercury* criticised his case as ill prepared. It was certainly far ahead of its time, considering that North Eton and Racecourse Central Mills were built with government loans of less than £50,000 between them. Donald's interests were comprehensive and his energy unbounded; he was agent in 1878, for J.W. Sutton and Co. of Eagle St., Brisbane, for Sutton's compressed air evaporator and sugar graining pan. "These pans have all the

advantages of the vacuum pan and cost only one tenth the price", ran his advertisement.

Geo. Raff and Co. of Brisbane became interested in Inverness during 1876 and installed Angus Bell as manager in 1877. Bell had been a sugar pioneer on the Logan River and at Mackay had managed Pleystowe mill for Hewitt and Romilly and Balmoral for William Hyne. Raff was a prominent Brisbane business man and pioneer southern planter. The Mackay Planters' Association at its inaugural meeting on 18th March 1878 decided to ask him to join, obviously to gain an influential voice and ear in Brisbane. He achieved geographical prominence on the North Side map as owner of Black Mountain — Por. 398 Bassett, comprising 1,781 acres. J.M. Costello (of the River Estate story) adjoined him with 642 acres to the north west of the mountain and Edward Denman at Etowrie had 597 acres on the corner north and north-east.

Inverness estate comprised 876 acres of which in 1877, 248 was prepared for cane. The 1877 crop made only about 150 tons of sugar, chiefly because the variety Meera had been neglected during the change of ownership.<sup>6</sup>

In Raff's time the plantation gained a reputation, to some extent unwarranted, for poor treatment of Islanders, partly because of litigation and official action involving breaches of "Kanaka" regulations. The fact that the complaints laid by the Islanders, or prompted by outsiders on their behalf, were attended to promptly, is a measure of the protection the Islander work force had generally as early as 1877. It is probably also a measure of the worth of Polynesian Inspectors Goodall and A.R. Macdonald.

Part of the criticism was directed against thatched quarters. The worst of the "grass huts" on many of the plantations were below standard, cramped, damp and draughty with little head room and their use was indefensible on several counts. Indeed after the great measles epidemic of 1875 the planters themselves needed little urging to get rid of them or improve them once they realised how vulnerable Islanders were to serious complications from chills.

The better type of grass huts were sturdy structures able to keep out wet seasons' rains and often built with great pride by the Islanders themselves. They offered, when new, more congenial shelter than many allegedly superior buildings of iron and wood which too often had limited window space, but they usually deteriorated quickly. The Inverness quarters had thatched roofs and were fitted with double bunks. Chimney-like ventilators were built through the roof.

A Justices Court fined Angus Bell in 1877 for failure to supply sufficient meat to his employees. Dyson Lacy and Henry Brandon J's P. presided and heard evidence from the Mackay Magistrate Capt. W.R. Goodall in his capacity as Protector of Polynesians. Goodall said Bell provided plenty to eat otherwise. A typical Inverness dinner menu was six ounces of cooked meat and a large bowl of rice eaten off tin plates. Islanders were not put on a meal allowance — they could eat as much as they wanted but waste was forbidden. (Captain William Robert Goodall was described by Ling Roth as "a very upright person and no respecter of persons". He surveyed most of the Kennedy District and had lost an eye in war in China in 1859.)

Bell is credited with having been the first miller to use megas in furnaces for evaporating batteries and steam boilers. Whether or not this was a technique he developed earlier in his career to provide heat and steam to the recovery processes as distinct from general furnace purposes, is not clear. Drying megas in the sun and

storing for general furnace requirements (and the panic mustering of all hands to get it under cover if it rained) was common to Mackay from the beginning.

The estate had 43 Melanesians and 10 Europeans in 1877 and most of the cane was grown on the flat country. Stony hills were a hazard and kangaroos and wallabies a pest; 30 acres of the richer hill scrub was in course of development at that time.

Inverness was acquired in the early eighties by J. McBryde, H.M. Finlayson and F.W. Poolman, formally called "McBryde, Finlayson and Co., Brisbane", but always referred to locally as McBryde and Finlayson. Philip Kirwan puts the date of sale at 1883, which seems accurate. *Pugh's Almanac* of 1883 names Geo. Raff as owner and A. Bell manager. That would be from 1882 season's records. The 1884 *Almanac* (recording details of 1883) lists the owners as McBryde, Finlayson and Poolman.8

The estate seemed on the make by 1880. It had made 324 tons of sugar in 1879 and expected 500 to 600 tons by 1883. Melanesian staff had increased to 55 and whites to 16. The new owners made little if any use of the mill. They had high hopes for a very efficient medium sized factory built at Richmond nearby in 1881. Inverness mill stood dismantled in 1886 and John McBryde told the Royal Commission in 1889 that it had not been used for several years. One of the two pots still survives at the old Richmond mill site, six to seven feet across and about 30 inches deep. The other saw use on the farm of Mr. George Farquhar as a horse trough. Among the Inverness machinery which survived at Richmond was a copper open pan about 7 ft. by 3 ft. with a curved bottom reaching a depth of about 12 inches.9

Inverness under McBryde and Finlayson comprised 640 acres, having lost 200 acres since Raff's time. Finlayson used it to breed good quality horses. In 1899, under special instructions from H.M. Finlayson to dispose of the estate as he thought best, William Begg Fordyce split the lands into seven farms. He retained one for himself and the other six went respectively to Sam Hamilton and E. Smith, John Donnelly and Bert Cairns, James Jamieson, G. Farquhar and Henry Turner. Donnelly and Cairns subsequently sold to Hamilton and Smith.<sup>10</sup>

Donnelly later occupied Duncrea farm, Farleigh. Sam Hamilton's sons, Sam and Jim, succeeded to the Hamilton blocks. The Jamieson and Farquhar families are still on the original blocks. The bulk of the Fordyce selection is (late 1970's) being farmed by the family of Mr. J. Borg and the Turner blocks by Mr. Charlie Borg.

One noteworthy pioneering link between these seaward districts and the western (Ashburton) districts is in the movements of John Donnelly. He had worked on Habana and became one of Long and Robertson's lessees. His son Arthur Patrick Donnelly was born at Inverness. A.P. Donnelly's wife was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. P. Dunworth of Grange Hill. (Mrs. Dunworth, it will be remembered, was Mary, sister of pioneer-writer J.T. O'Riordan). Thomas Kirwan, Inverness head ploughman, was the father of Philip Kirwan, of whom much more will be told.

I. Q.S.A. LAN/P34; LAN/AG 520.

<sup>2.</sup> Related M.A.C. M.M. 24-9-1892.

<sup>3.</sup> Contemporary news reports M.M. late May 1873; D.M. 13-2-1929.

<sup>4.</sup> Philip Kirwan memoirs; family recollections; P.R.F.A. minutes; Contemporary M.M. reports 1878-79; Q.S.A. LAN/P34; LAN/AG 533.

<sup>5.</sup> M.P.A. minutes 18-3-1878 courtesy M.H.S.

<sup>6.</sup> M.M. 29-9-1877.

- 7. M.M. 13-10-1877; Port Mackay by H. Ling Roth.
- 8. M.M. Bell ref. May-June 1881; Pugh's Almanac, though not always accurate, agrees with local recollections.
- 9. 1889 Royal Commission report gives owners as Finlayson and Poolman; M.M. May-June 1881.
- 10. Letter of authority written from Hotel Cecil, Brisbane, among Fordyce family papers.

## Part twenty

## THE CEDARS

#### M.H. Black

Three brothers Black came to Mackay in the early seventies. Maurice Hume settled at The Cedars in 1871, Henry Bowyer became proprietor of the *Mackay Standard* in 1876 and Frederick Holmes Mardan founded the firm of F. Black and Co. (later F. Black Pty. Ltd.) in 1883.

They were three of the five sons of Alexander Black, a close relative of Adam Black, head of an Edinburgh publishing house. Their mother was a niece of Joseph Hume, for many years "father" of the House of Commons. Hume Black was educated at St. Pauls, London and Bonn in Germany. He spoke fluent German. In his mature years he was a distinctive figure, bearded, urbane and an eloquent speaker, bitingly sarcastic at times and adept at handling interjections. H.B. Black became renowned as a "colonial" journalist and an authority on the Queensland sugar industry. Frederick Black, as a student had been a gold medallist in mathematics.

At Bonn, Hume developed a lung complaint, which partly contributed to his decision, when barely 17-years-old, to emigrate to Australia. He arrived in 1852. He worked in South Australia and on the Bendigo goldfields, later as a shepherd at Reidy Lake station (Messrs. Orr and Keane) and then on Meilman station (William Rae) on the Murray River. He overlanded sheep from Queensland to Meilman and became station manager in 1863.

He later became managing partner with Wm. Sloane and Co. at Eaglefield (with which was incorporated Lenton Downs), in the Mackay hinterland. When this failed as a sheep run, he bought 891 acres (Pors. 114 and 41 Bassett) on the North Side and called it The Cedars from a thick grove of Mackay cedar on the main selection.<sup>2</sup>

He had a bent for mechanics and mechanical innovation which lent added attraction to prospects of developing a sugar plantation. In 1863, while at Meilman, he had developed a steam operated sheep washing machine.<sup>3</sup>

Black also owned Por. 29 in the Wainai-Barcoo-Glendaragh sector and Por. 28 in the Miclere-Dulverton sector. The latter joined Spiller's Por. 420 and was held in partnership with Henry Brandon and H.J. Jane.<sup>4</sup>

Jos. Antoney of Eton ran 600 head of cattle, on lease from Black, on 1,280 acres of freehold at Mt. Castor, cut from the Hamilton-Pinnacle run then owned by D.H. Dalrymple and Harry Murry. This would have been ideal to supply the Hamilton Central Mill had it been built. Hume Black's son Walter owned 1,280 acres nearby.

The Cedars had 51 acres under cane in 1873, with 100 expected by 1874. Black bought his machinery, including a still, from Robert Towns in Townsville in 1872. It was unloaded on the North Side, at Devil's Elbow, about a mile upstream from the town, from the sailing ship *Young Australia*. Bullock wagons hauled it to the construction site.<sup>6</sup>

The distillery never operated. Black's political opponents mentioned the fact occasionally but Black seems to have avoided comment. It was probably part of a package deal, since Towns had been anxious to get rid of the whole plant and the price was low.

H.B. Black had been with his brother at Eaglefield and in 1871 Hume invited him to help with the establishment of the new plantation. He arrived after the first crushing had started, just when Hume's French engineer, a M. de Koch had an accident. With two weeks' experience in the sugar industry "H.B." found himself a sugar boiler. He recalled that it took 16 tons of cane to make a ton of sugar, which brought about £32 a ton.

He said he was at The Cedars for five years. However he opened the *Mackay Standard* in 1876 and was in Brisbane for a few months before that freelance writing for the *Brisbane Courier*. This allowed three seasons of exclusive sugar work.

Wm. Sloane and Co. are believed to have been closely involved in The Cedars until 1877 and to have provided capital after 1875 (the "rust" year). After 1877 and probably before, as suggested by his association with Henry Brandon, the A.J.S. Bank had the account. In that year the output capacity of the mill was 300 tons. A flat battery was used for boiling and a Gadsden pan and simple lime process for sugar recovery. Hume Black lived on the plantation to begin with but later moved to the coast, where Black's Beach perpetuates his name.

Philip Kirwan remembered The Cedars: "Five foot drills were opened (for planting). The Kanakas dropped the plants from bundles carried in the crook of their arms — then down on their knees with the plants poked into the ground, eyes (growing points) pointing upwards and covered by hand. In dry weather the plants were 'picked' in before covering (i.e. a hole was dug with a pick, or sometimes a mattock). As the years went on hoes were used for covering. In later years plants were dropped, trampled into the soil and covered by a stripped Planet Junior (a contemporary plough)".8

Various versions of The Cedars stack story have passed into North Side folklore. Philip Kirwan says: "A man named Treloar built the first chimney stack. He drew his cheque one evening and there came a heavy night's rain. The mill was to have a trial run and a party had been planned for the event. On the morning of the trial, M.H. Black, from his house on the hill, suggested to his guests that they climb the stack and have a good look at the countryside."

An assertion that the stack had dissolved into a heap of clay probably maligns the

builder too much, but the workmanship was poor. Kirwan says Hume Black rode at top speed to town, only to discover that his man was on his way to Brisbane.

Significantly, large crops grew on the hillsides. "Jethro Tull" said: "The steepness . . . . . necessitated cutting many roads or 'sidings', thus exposing the subsoil for miles". Drays hauled much of the cane but an elementary tramway system of 3 in. by 2 in. hardwood "rails" on Mackay cedar sleepers allowed horses to haul trucks in "rakes" of two or three. The system was successful enough to warrant extension but was severely damaged by fire in 1885.

Philip Kirwan, whose memory for machinery is much more reliable than his memory for dates, knew The Cedars well. He wrote: "At The Cedars a fly wheel and spur wheel drove three small rollers. There was no carrier. There was a table in front of the rollers. Kanakas carried the cane from where it was tipped out of drays and placed on the table. A Kanaka woman on each side pushed the cane into the rollers. Aboriginal women were also tried at this work. The megas came out pretty wet and was loaded into a dray and distributed all round the yard. Then two or three Kanakas with tumbling tommies kept turning it over until it was thoroughly dry, when it was burned under the tache, which did the preparatory boiling".

"The juice was run from the rollers into the subsider — big zinc lined tanks. After the major portion of the impurities had settled, the more or less clear juice was run into the tache. The tache was divided into three compartments. In the last of the three the juice acquired the right density for transfer into the open pans to be boiled into sugar."

"In The Cedars there was a jib with an attached winch; a chain ran from the winch to a big cauldron with a valve in the bottom. The cauldron was lowered into the bubbling liquor, the valve opened and the cauldron filled. Then a Kanaka on each side operated the winch and the cauldron was swung over the open pans and emptied. The steam power was such (two boilers) that crushing and boiling could not proceed together so they crushed in the day and boiled at night."

"When the sugar was 'grained' in the open pan it was run into underground cement tanks. Kanakas, naked to the waist, bucketed the massecuite into the fugals. The massecuite was boiled and boiled until the final molasses stage was reached. At that stage it was barely recognisable as sugar, yet it was this mess that was supplied to both white and black employees with which to sweeten their tea."

"The sugar was wheeled from the fugals to the sugar room in a wheelbarrow. The sugar room was two or three feet over the mill floor level. An old time grocer's scale was used for weighing the sugar into 70 lb. bags, or mats holding about 50 lbs. There was no weighbridge — the yield of sugar as bagged was the only way of checking the yield."

Kirwan wrote that at one time Walter Black and a sugar boiler were the only white men at the mill. An Islander named Yatha acted as engineer. The record of this Islander's role is probably partly apochryphal but certainly some enterprising Islanders lost the chance of learning new skills when, late in 1883, Islander employment in mills was prohibited.<sup>9</sup>

The plantation seems to have been established on fairly slender resources but it was fairly typical of the "300 ton" plantation of the day and worked with a proportion of about five Islanders to one white man.<sup>10</sup>

"Jethro Tull" said all scrub cane cutting was done by Islanders on piece work,

indicating industrial enlightenment on Black's part. He praised the output of Tanna "boys": "Three.... will cut and stack two and a half chords of wood a day and finish by five o'clock. Billets are 5 ft. long and some are as heavy as a strong man can lift. Only Tannas keep up this average and it is higher than that of contract white men". The Islanders were housed in a single building which was regarded as good. It was warmed in winter by a fireplace and could house 60 men comfortably."

Set in difficult terrain, The Cedars was not a show place but it was believed to have been profitable, particularly in 1881–84. Black proposed to extend his cultivation and "tramway" system and upgrade the mill in 1885, which was believed to have been a good year for him in spite of the passing of the early eighties boom; but the A.J.S. Bank suddenly closed him down. Perhaps it was because the bank's advisers accurately read the portents for the later eighties, though no one could have predicted the devastating 1888 drought. Perhaps the bank panicked at the 1890 deadline on use of Islanders Griffith announced in 1885.

The 1885 fire destroyed a lot of cane as well as part of the tramway. Perhaps Wm. Sloane and Co. still had money to recover. In any case Black may have been lucky he closed when he did. There was no longer a place for "plain uncomplicated" plantations and major capital outlays could not, on the record of other Mackay plantations, have been recouped before 1888 and certainly not for a long time after.

Henry Brandon left Mackay in 1884. It was said that had he stayed, The Cedars may have remained open. The Cedars' growing crop of 1885, was sent to River Estate North in 1886 and probably a few rations in 1887. Whether the juice mill was still operating or whether the cane was transferred to the tramline running to the main River Estate mill, or hauled down in drays is not clear.

#### Political Paradoxes

In a political career fraught with paradox, Hume Black emerges eminently as one of a long line of local political pragmatists. He was freely tipped to be either leader or deputy leader of a proposed northern colony. John Murtagh Macrossan probably had the edge in those leadership stakes but at Mackay, Black's political opponents at the *Mercury*, Liberals J.V. Chataway, T.D. Chataway and W.G. Hodges, favoured him as leader, if there had to be one.

Black had won Mackay after F.T. Amhurst died in 1881. The planters first asked Alfred Hewitt of Pleystowe but he declined. (Hewitt had lost to Brisbane barrister Edward O'Donnell McDevitt in 1870 when Mackay formed part of the South Kennedy electorate.) In 1881 townsman Michael Fay decided to run and the planters asked both J.E. Davidson and D.H. Dalrymple to nominate but each declined. They then asked Black.

One of his exchanges with an old adversary, Michael Ready, highlights one aspect of the black labour argument. Ready had had a disagreement with Black at Eaglefield, where the latter had employed Islanders. In 1881 Ready employed Kanakas on carrying work at Mackay. Black declared a firm policy on Kanaka employment during the campaign. He said Islanders should be restricted to tropical and semi-tropical labour. (This meant denying their employment on pastoral runs.) He said they should not work on roads or as teamsters, nor be employed in stores, hotels nor as general servants.

Donald Beaton (then a Liberal, but on the way to becoming a Labour Party pioneer) asked what was to be done with white immigrants. Black said he had never known a good working man to starve. The sugar industry could absorb them all. (The thrust of the planters' argument was that black labour was needed to create the necessary jobs.)<sup>12</sup>

Michael Ready: "Are Kanakas necessary?" Black: "Necessary for sugar plantations".

Ready: "Were you not the first to take them inland?"

Black: "I was, but the system was not a good one. At the time I had no alternative".

Ready: "Is it compulsory to have Kanakas as cooks and nursemaids?" (Black's Islanders filled such posts.)

Black: "No more compulsory than it is for Mr. Ready to have a Kanaka drive his dray in the streets of Mackay".

A McIlwraith Conservative, Black frequently had to mediate between the planters and the Griffith administration while he was in opposition and also to try to soften the political effects of McIlwraith's own strictures on black labour when the latter was in office.

In July 1882, for instance, Farleigh's Robert Walker accused Black of not pushing hard enough for coolie importation. Many of Black's colleagues were less than sympathetic to sugar labour problems and McIlwraith faced political risks by advocating entry of Asiatics. Then in November 1885 Black vainly tried to influence his opposition colleagues to support Griffith's Central Mill vote and finally voted for the measure in spite of stonewalling tactics against it by his leader Boyd Morehead.

The separation question was a thorny one for northern members. J.M. Macrossan's original championship of the movement became muted after he accepted a McIlwraith cabinet post in 1879 and much public money was channelled northwards. (Earlier Macrossan had been a Liberal.) The Northern Separation League was formed in Townsville in 1882 with Thankfull Willmett as secretary. Soon afterwards George Smith became secretary of a Mackay branch. In 1886 a petition of 10,000 names (the validity of which was hotly disputed by Griffith) called for northern separation.

In 1887 Black and one of the two members for Kennedy, Isidore Lissner, were chosen to join Harold Finch-Hatton, (a principal in a separationist lobby in London), in putting the separation case to the Colonial Office. Harold Finch-Hatton gloomily reported: "I gather from Sir Henry Holland, that Her Majesty's legal advisers are distinctly of the opinion that the powers of the Crown as regards any future subdivision of Queensland, would be limited".<sup>13</sup>

He felt the Colonial Office would "take up as little direct responsibility as it could by throwing the burden of decision on the House of Commons vote". And so it happened. Sir Henry, (later Lord Knutsford and once referred to in the Mackay Press as "Lord-facing-both-ways Knutsford") was not prepared to rock any boats. The House of Commons was largely disinterested.

At home, T.D. Chataway accurately forecast Hume Black's future dilemma: "If the present (i.e. McIlwraith) opposition became the Government some of the northern members would become cabinet ministers and as such (would be) useless to us (i.e. separationists), as they cannot obstruct their own Government". Again so it happened.<sup>14</sup>

Black's reputation as a public figure stood high and he enjoyed public life.

McIlwraith regained office in 1888. At Mackay Black survived a determined campaign by W.G. Hodges on a Griffith Liberal platform. D.H. Dalrymple, drawing some support from both camps, on personal rather than ideological grounds, was elected for his first term. Black favoured decentralisation measures promised by McIlwraith and this took much of the sting out of the separationists' argument that the North was being milked of funds and denied a fair voice in expenditure planning.

At the end of May (1888), Black announced that "in view of the present state of disarray of the separation movement", he would accept a ministry post if asked. He was given Lands and Agriculture. J.M. Macrossan went to Works and Mines. George Smith saw this as the destruction of the hopes of the separationists and Thankfull Willmett, now League president, said: "Separation must remain in abeyance for some time", which led the *Mercury* to observe that if the separationists followed their president's lead, "We shall have heard the last of separation for years to come". The *Standard* had earlier acted to get M.H. Black off the hook by observing that Federation was becoming the more significant issue.<sup>15</sup>

T.D. Chataway chastised Macrossan, originally for deserting Griffith to take a cabinet post with McIlwraith in 1879–83 and then for deserting the separationist cause. The separationists had expected their northern supporters to stand as a party — something they never did.<sup>16</sup>

As Minister for Agriculture, Black fostered the establishment of two travelling dairies to visit rural areas. One remained in Mackay district for many months, its itinerary, in classic decentralised style, drawn up by the P.R.F.A.<sup>17</sup>

Black's rural career missed the tide of fortune at Eaglefield and The Cedars and he missed out on being a major cane supplier to the abortive Hamilton Central Mill. In a period when an M.L.A. needed a substantial personal income, such setbacks were serious. C.A. Bernays says they tended to embitter him.<sup>18</sup>

He resigned Parliament in 1890 and was succeeded by his old Liberal opponent J.V. Chataway. This was a watershed period of Queensland politics which saw a Griffith-McIlwraith coalition in power and the rise of the Labour Party, factors which were to be vital in Farleigh's short term (and long term) future.

Black became a special representative of the Queensland Government in London, and later spent some time in Western Australia. He renewed connections with Henry Brandon and became involved in several mining ventures. One of them, in association with John Ferguson of Mt. Morgan fame, was said to have been most profitable. He died in Western Australia in 1899.

#### H.B. Black

H.B. Black was a North Side resident for only a few years but he had a great catalytic effect on the development of local sugar affairs; and he was his brother's very effective public relations voice. He opened the *Standard* in 1876 in partnership with E.J. Welch, Government Works foreman of the gangs which built the original Hospital Bridge. After a few months Black assumed complete ownership of the paper. Co-incidentally, E.J. Welch had been a member of the party which found John King of the Burke and Wills party, and W.O. Hodgkinson, principal founder of the *Mercury* had also been associated with that expedition.

H.B. Black was a lucid and informed editorialist, whose classical education was

reflected in a fluid, latinised literary style. This drew such jibes as "predictably polysyllabic" from his opposite number T.D. (Tom) Chataway at the *Mercury*, who was himself a fluent and perceptive leader writer, but with a style more akin to that of present day journalism.

Black's *Standard* became a sugar industry authority and when J.V. Chataway began the *Sugar Journal and Tropical Cultivator* in 1892, Mackay sugar men were well served with technical news and commentary. While Black was freelance writing in Brisbane in 1876, he arranged with Gresley Lukin, then of the *Courier*, to test the commercial possibilities of promoting Eastes sugar recovery process which Robert Walker has used successfully at Foulden. Spiller allowed him full facilities at River Estate but he reported against it. The Icery process and developing chemical processes superceded it.

H.B. Black was prominent in local theatricals and wrote at least one play, "Zelma". He assisted with concert tour arrangements for Hume's daughter, Helena, who was an accomplished conert singer. He speculated in local mining ventures, established a commission agency and stood unsuccessfully for Parliament in 1896.<sup>19</sup>

In 1892 he became secretary of the Queensland Central Mill League which had been formed at Plane Creek following a meeting called by Patrick McKenny, Edmund Atherton and four others. He acted for landholders at Marian and Plane Creek. His draft of a proposed bill became an important basis for the Sugar Works Guarantee Act of 1893.<sup>20</sup>

The administration of that Act demonstrates the nature of the dilemmas, Hume Black often contended with. The progenitors of the original central mills were Pearce and Hodges, Liberals, with strong grass roots urgings by McKenny and Donald Beaton. Hume Black deserted his Conservative colleagues in supporting the original Parliamentary vote. Then as Minister for Agriculture, he found the mills partly in his care. The legislative progenitor of the second Act was H.B. Black, the Conservative editor of the old "planters' rag". In 1898 when W.G. Hodges' former partner, J.V. Chataway became Minister for Agriculture, the working of the 1893 Act was transferred to him.

Farleigh twice, conceivably, could have operated within the Central Mills legislation but local sugar affairs were as complex as local politics and Farleigh, to survive, had to break new ground, as the nation's first sugar co-operative.

<sup>1.</sup> The business was originally at the river end of Sydney Street. In 1905 it shifted to premises opposite the present 'old town hall'. Frederick Black died in Sydney in 1925, aged 84. E.W. Hurley took over in 1926 and the firm was continued by his widow, Mrs. K. Hurley, until her death in 1956 and then by Messrs. A.E. and J. Noonan, respectively father and cousin of Farleigh Deputy Chairman A.J. Noonan.

<sup>2.</sup> Obit. M.S. 18-8-1889.

<sup>3.</sup> Date and detail A Thousand Miles Away by G.C. Bolton p 84.

<sup>4.</sup> Q.S.A. Map J5/2 Bassett 1914; A.J.S. Bank reference from various oral sources.

<sup>5.</sup> T.S.F.M. p 51 et seq. The proposed mill site was on John Gargett's block "Barwood". Large blocks in the area were also held by the Hon. J.M. Macrossan and the Hon. Boyd Morehead, Conservative leader in the Queensland House of Assembly.

<sup>6.</sup> M.M. May 1873.

<sup>7.</sup> D.M. 25-9-1908.

<sup>8.</sup> Philip Kirwan memoirs by courtesy M.D.C.G.E.

<sup>9.</sup> M.M. May-June 1883; Kirwan memoirs; date of fire confirmed by various oral recollections.

- 10. M.M. 12-3-1881.
- 11. M.M. 16-6-1883.
- 12. M.M. 12-3-1881.
- 13. M.M. 26-3-1887.
- 14. M.M. 31-5-1887.
- 15. M.S. 28-5-1888.
- 16. M.M. 19-5-1888.
- 17. P.R.F.A. minutes.
- 18. Queensland Politics over Sixty Years, by C.A. Bernays.
- 19. Results were: D.H. Dairymple 783 and J.V. Chataway 783 (both sitting members); H.B. Black 750 and Simon Tait (Labor Party) 407.
- 20. The Act was passed four days before Parliament was prorogued and shortly before Sir Thomas McIlwraith retired. In 1911 D.M. editor W.J. Manning recalled it as "one of the last great legislative acts of a great legislator".

## Part twenty-one

# RICHMOND

### **Cumming and McCready**

The Richmond sugar lands were a complex of estates involving at various times Andrew Cumming (who named Richmond), fellow Scot Hugh McCready (who became his partner) and another pair of Scots, John McBryde and Hector McKenzie Finlayson, and their partner F.W. Poolman. Edward Denman, from whom Cumming purchased some of his early land, was involved as a trustee and administrator for Cumming interests and William Begg Fordyce, who finally dispersed the McBryde and Finlayson holdings, provides a direct link with the modern Farleigh story.

Andrew Cumming named the plantation from one he had owned at St. Vincents in the West Indies, in partnership with a cousin named McPherson. He married in the West Indies into a creole family whose connections with the islands date back three centuries.<sup>1</sup>

Cumming and his wife and at least one small child came to Melbourne in the 1860's. He was experienced in sugar making and refining and soon found employment in a Melbourne refinery. He shifted to the Tooth and Cran refinery at Yengarie in Queensland and then to Mackay where he became one of the earliest permanent North Side selectors. Hugh McCready joined him in partnership in 1870.<sup>2</sup>

The two had known each other on St. Vincents. McCready was the younger man and had worked as a youth for three years on sugar plantations on both St. Vincents and St. Kitts. Cumming is believed to have encouraged him to come to Australia but he returned to Scotland first. He arrived in Queensland, aged 22 years, aboard the *Legion of Honour* (Captain Grimmer) on 5th July 1864. He spent several seasons with Hope at Ormiston and at Pimpama.<sup>3</sup>

In the summer of 1869–70 Alfred Hewitt wanted a manager for Pleystowe, which he and Charles Romilly had bought in 1868. Hope recommended McCready who came to be regarded as Pleystowe's first manager, although Joseph Holmes had continued to manage the plantation for a year or so after, he sold to Hewitt and Romilly.<sup>4</sup>

McCready left in May 1873 after Hewitt took over the management personally. It has been suggested the capable, self confident and tenacious McCready did not team well with the hot headed Hewitt. McCready was at Te Kowai in the latter half of 1875 where his efforts to combat the rust crisis rate among the more memorable in Mackay district.

His staff combed affected paddocks, "roguing" diseased stools and preserving plants from healthy stools standing in diseased patches. Such efforts on Te Kowai No. 2 — later Palms Plantation — allied to prompt imports of disease free material, gave Wm. Sloane and Co., when they took over from T.H. Fitzgerald in 1876, the nucleus of fine disease free crops.

McCready profited personally from these efforts. He joined in a syndicate which imported new varieties. Some were planted on his Richmond lands and their produce was sold in the next two or three years for plants, at a good profit.<sup>6</sup>

Wm. Sloane and Co. were doubly fortunate in having McCready in charge and capable Mauritius trained Daniel Dupont managing the Te Kowai factory. In the second post-rust season (1877) Te Kowai made a profit of £15,000. Wm. Sloane and Co. did very well out of Fitzgerald's misfortune.

McCready's partnership with Andrew Cumming was dissolved in April 1877. In 1879, McCready bought 550 acres on Bakers Creek from Charles Keeley to establish Palmyra plantation. He subsequently doubled the size of the estate with land bought, at least in part, from Michael Ready. The mill first crushed in 1883. Whether it began as a double crusher is not clear, but in the early 1890's it had a 5 ft. unit and a 3 ft. unit to which was added in 1895, the district's only five roller mill, bought through Cameron and Green (Mackay foundry) who were agents for Aitkin, McNeil and Co., Glasgow.<sup>8</sup>

Placed No. 1 in the milling train, the new mill could handle a steady 14 tons of cane per hour with no perceptible vibration. Two of the five rollers performed as shredders, allowing greatly enhanced crushing performance by the other three, compared to the conventional three roller units. It had its idiosyncracies which James McCready remembered well: "Islanders treated the gear lever with utmost circumspection. It was very hard to 'throw in' and if the load went on too early it had a kick like a mule".9

The plantation prospered. McCready and his good friend William Hyne (of Balmoral and later Meadowlands) were regarded as an outstanding pair of smaller planter-millers who, by good management and husbandry, weathered the troubles of the eighties better than most.

In 1892, Palmyra cut 400 acres of cane at an average of 18 to 20 tons per acre. An 8 in. centrifugal pump irrigated six acres a day. A ton of sugar was recovered from 13

tons of cane. By 1895 a ton of sugar came from only 8½ tons of cane and this could have been reduced to one in seven with maceration but McCready was unable to macerate because he had no triple effet evaporation. 10

He began installing effet vessels and making other improvements after the 1897 harvest but cyclone Eline in February 1898 dealt a financial blow which was aggravated by the cost pressures and dry years which followed. James McCready said the plantation never fully recovered, although in late 1903, Hugh McCready was planning to extend his already renowned irrigation plant.

Besides a survival attempt, this seems to have been part of a productivity programme in which he sought to capitalise on excellent results of fertiliser trials he had begun in association with the State Nursery five years earlier. He was disillusioned. Despite a big crop in 1905, he made that year his last crushing as a miller, beaten he declared, mostly by labour problems. (His views on irrigation were advanced and respected. So much so that John Drysdale — the sugar industry's greatest irrigation pioneer — invited him to the Burdekin to advise on cane growing under irrigation conditions there.)<sup>11</sup>

McCready brought out orphanage lads from Scotland as part of a plan to overcome the labour problems of the nineties. He planned to extend this to an indenture or apprenticeship system but was largely frustrated by what he bitterly castigated as official apathy and suspicion that he was merely seeking sweated labour. Certainly many Scottish lads were denied an excellent chance of making a start for themselves in the Colonies under expert tuition.

McCready was chairman of the Mackay-Croydon Prospecting Company. When J.E. Davidson was overseas in 1891 he took over the management of the Melbourne Mackay Sugar Company.<sup>12</sup>

Soon after Palmyra was established on a profitable footing (which was virtually from the beginning), McCready headed a syndicate which planned a sugar mill on Catherine Creek in what is now the Wagoora end of Farleigh's North Coast districts. This led to an influx of small selectors into the area. McCready took up 1,280 acres of freehold and had ordered mill machinery. The venture never developed and part of the machinery later went to North Eton. Some of the Wagoora selections remained in the hands of the McCready family until the late 1960's.

Two of Hugh McCready's sons, Lionel and James grew cane at Wagoora. Lionel McCready's son Colin was killed while serving with the R.A.A.F. in World War II and a grandson, Colin Clarke, was lost when a concrete hulled tourist vessel sank with all on board in cyclone Ada, which ravaged the Whitsunday Islands in January 1970.

After Palmyra closed, Hugh McCready and his family (his wife had died some years earlier) paid a two year visit to Scotland. He was saddened at the need to close Palmyra and embittered at what he regarded as lack of official action in attacking industry problems which he had always maintained could have been overcome. He also suffered from dropsy and died at "Palmyra", Mildura, the home of his daughter, early in 1910, aged 68. He was buried next to his wife at Palmyra, Mackay. (Hugh McCready's parents are buried at the Mackay cemetery.)<sup>13</sup>

Lionel McCready became chemist-in-charge of the Mackay Sugar Experiment Station when Dr. A.J. Gibson was appointed Superintendent of Sugar Experiment Stations in 1910. Another son, William, managed Palms for the Australian Mortgage Company during World War I. He was succeeded by J.W. Inverarity soon after the

War's end. Youngest son James was a sugar chemist at Meadowlands, Cattle Creek, Kalamia and North Eton.

Andrew Cumming continued to grow extremely heavy crops at Richmond. He sold to McBryde and Finlayson in 1880-81 but Cumming interests were retained in the adjacent Woodlands which bordered Nindaroo. Distant fields had always held a challenge for Andrew Cumming. He spent many lonely months "roughing it" on northern minefields and often wrote of how he missed the comforts of home. He joined his old friend T.H. Fitzgerald on the Johnstone River. Neither was young any longer and both contracted Johnstone fever. He died from an attack or from complications brought on by a series of bouts. Family descendants today are intimately connected with Mackay business and sugar circles.

#### McBryde and Finlayson

John McBryde told the 1889 Royal Commission he then had 18 years' experience in tropical cultivation. John Kerr has established that the block called Glenalbyn was selected by him in 1869.<sup>14</sup>

Hector McKenzie Finlayson was then a commission agent in Mackay. By 1872 they were in partnership at Glenalbyn and planned to build a mill. Many people later believed a mill had been built, including Aneas Munro in 1894–95 writing in *The Sugar Fields of Mackay*. He was certainly told so by locals. Hazy recollections recall a connection between Glenalbyn and Donald McDonald. Spiller bought the block shortly before he left Mackay so there is a possibility his trusty and energetic field officer, as well as owning Auchnacroish by that time, was in some way involved in growing and/or shifting cane from the block.<sup>15</sup>

The purchase of Inverness by McBryde, Finlayson and Poolman became part of an ambitious plan to develop a central mill complex which would tap production from some of the best hillside lands on the North Side. Even when river flat planters had doubts about the scrub lands, Cumming and McCready grew heavy crops on the hill slopes. Thick barrelled 19-month-old canes up to 20 feet long were reported in 1874 — probably Black Tanna.<sup>16</sup>

"Jethro Tull", *The Queenslander* correspondent, credited Hugh McCready with having first cultivated the hills and with having imported Black Tanna while he was at Richmond. By 1883 there were large stands at Woodlands, Etowrie and Nindaroo.<sup>17</sup>

The Queenslander articles describe extensive "sidings" at The Cedars and note that "on the well managed River Estate, steep, stony, black soil forest hills are successfully cultivated"; but the hillsides became more difficult as they ran into Inverness.

Hill scrub crops ratooned for many years. J.H. Maplethorpe (Farleigh director 1944-53) recalled that as a boy he slid down wooden chutes once used to direct high country harvested cane to waiting drays. "They had sloping sides, something in excess of two feet across the top, narrowing to eighteen inches at the floor. We used to sit on pads of trash and slide down — not from the top though, for they went a long way up the hillsides."

Injuries were not uncommon among the Islanders and there is at least one authenticated case vouched for by Edward Denman's son Robert, of an Islander being speared to death by a heavy stick which sped from the chute. The incident was related so often that the impression developed that it was a common occurrence.

The Richmond Sugar Company's "magnificent plant" was on the water early in 1881. The mill site was 10 acres purchased by the "Richmond Estates, surrounded by several selections". 18

Mill manager was a Mr. Balderston and a Mr. Blackmoor (or Blackmur), superintended erection of the plant. This included a single set of rollers 3 ft. 10 ins. by 22 ins. in diameter, driven by a 50 h.p. horizontal engine. Two boilers were installed. Aspinall steam heated evaporating batteries were an improvement on the flame heated Suttons batteries commonly used. The two boilers were used to capacity. Richmond is credited with having been the first Mackay mill to discard fire heated batteries and work entirely by steam.

A charcoal process converted molasses to golden syrup out of season. Originally open pan sugar boiling operated but this was soon augmented by a 6 ft. vacuum pan and finally replaced by vacuum equipment. William Robertson of the Victoria Foundry, Mackay, built the stack — 44 ft. high by 3 ft. square. It is the only early Mackay district mill stack still standing (1983). The machinery came variously from Glasgow (A.W. Smith and Co.) Greenock, Brisbane and Mackay and together with buildings cost initially £10,000.

Richmond is credited with having had the only refining plant north of Bundaberg. The centrifuge "basket" from this equipment survived among the mill remains for many years. Whether the equipment was comparable with, or similar to Farleigh's cube making plant, has often been debated but Richmond whites were known at times to have fetched £1 a ton more than Yengarie whites landed at Melbourne. In 1883 Richmond won top award for golden syrup at the Mackay Show. This was an highly regarded colonial award. In 1888 its white sugar took first prize at the Melbourne Exhibition.

In the final disposal of assets, W.B. Fordyce bought the 10 acre mill site and his son George lived there for many years. Besides the stack, relics included concrete foundations, the boiler, belt driven fugals and a mill roller. A 40 ft. well, 15 ft. across and expertly bricked still holds water. A steam driven pump several feet down remained mounted for several decades. A large steel tank sat under the office adjacent the mill on the top of a slope. It was a reservoir for surplus juice when crushing rate exceeded recovery rate.

Hailed as a breakthrough for the central mill concept four years before Queensland's central mill movement "took off" at Mackay, Richmond never quite achieved the ideal. Inverness provided most of the owners' cane and Woodlands, owned by the Cumming Estate, delivered most from outside. Finally Woodlands provided the bulk of the annual crop.

John McBryde told the 1889 Royal Commission that Richmond and Inverness estates totalled 1,070 acres; 330 were cultivated for cane, 220 having been harvested in 1,888 for only 75 tons of sugar and 2,500 gallons of molasses. The plant could turn out 600 tons of sugar in a season. The 1888 crop was about one quarter of what could reasonably have been expected; £30,000 was invested; working expenses in 1888 were £2,568 and the loss for the year was £1,300. This loss, with 75 tons of sugar made, indicates the nature of the expectations which prompted construction of this type of mill. Had the target output of 600 tons been achieved, the profit potential with sugar bringing around £20 a ton, was considerable.

McBryde's figures relating to his labour force give an idea of the different categories

of labour a plantation needed: 13 Europeans, one coolie, 52 Islanders. In their first indentured period, Islanders were paid £6 to £9 a year (with all found, hospitalisation, indemnity payments to the Government and costs of procurement and repatriation added). Expirees received £12 to £15 a year and coolies ten shillings a week plus found.

Annual wage for a European was £60/10/5d, (not always with full keep). One white ploughman could handle 40 acres of cultivation with back-up Islander labour for

planting, weeding and trashing.19

The partnership's cane acreage peaked at 500 acres but after 1891 the mill relied increasingly on outside cane. About this time white sugar manufacture ceased. By 1894 the partners had only 130 acres under cane which probably did not yield 2,500 tons for harvest. No crop was planted for 1895.

The fate of the mill was in doubt for some months but in mid-1895, while Farleigh was making its bold bid for profitability with the Ashburton purchase, permanent closure was announced. Independent growers contracted with Nindaroo or Habana. As previously related, W.B. Fordyce disposed of the McBryde and Finlayson North Side assets.<sup>20</sup>

Fordyce had arrived in Queensland from Scotland in the *Jumna* in 1888. He had a quiet personality but became something of a shipboard leader and was well remembered also because he played a musical instrument at many a sing-along. By 1895 at Richmond he had become a valued executive type employee and friend of the two older Scots. That year McBryde left to manage Rous sugar mill on the Richmond River in New South Wales.<sup>21</sup>

Fordyce acted as manager of the Richmond lands. Notable among blocks he acquired for himself was Cockpen (about 300 acres) which had been leased from F.W. Poolman and used for timber and grazing. James Croker was Poolman's agent.<sup>22</sup>

#### Seaforth

Finlayson handled the grazing side of the Richmond partnership and about the time Richmond mill was built, was running a large mob of cattle on 6,192 acres on the North Coast, southwards from Port Newry and about 30 miles from Mackay. He lived there, in a well appointed open verandahed wooden house on a rise overlooking the sea. He called the run Seaforth after his Rosshire home, in Scotland.

By 1890 he was turning off as many as 1,000 head of cattle at a time, but by the end of the nineties, ticks and redwater, which had been spreading inexorably southwards from the Gulf for most of the decade, had smitten coastal grazing lands north of Mackay. Markets also declined. One mob Finlayson overlanded to the South scarcely returned the cost of the trip.

The area seemed to have potential for closer settlement, with Port Newry close by, but there were no takers when, in 1897 McBryde and Finlayson decided to sell up. They then submitted it to the Lands Department for surrender "at a just valuation", under the Agricultural Lands Repurchase Act of 1894. C.A. Bernays has recorded the basics of the subsequent transaction. The partners asked £4/7/1d. an acre — just under £27,000 for the lot. In a report dated October 1898, W.R. Gray, Land Ranger at Mackay, put his value at £6,480/13/1d. on acreage values as follows: 160 acres scrub at 40s.; 3,770 acres good forest at 28/6d. and 2,268 acres of inferior land at 10s.<sup>23</sup>

Later, Land Board member W.C. Hume declared the land would not bring 15s. an

acre in South Queensland and not more than 30s. an acre at Mackay. Then, with apparent inconsistency he said the land was suitable for cane growing and there was a steady demand for such land. He awarded the vendors £3/13/-. and in 1889 the Government paid £22,622/14/-. Twenty years later the Government had not sold a single acre and in 1933, revenue received from the approximately 10 square miles was £730/17/4d.<sup>24</sup>

The transaction was regularly referred to as "a scandal" at subsequent State elections. It seems that Finlayson took advantage of a legislative act in a manner not dissimilar to the advantage E.M. Long took when he mortgaged Pleystowe lands to secure Pleystowe mill.<sup>25</sup>

W.C. Hume had been scarcely correct when he said there had been a steady demand for such sugar land. By 1897 there was little chance of a mill being built anywhere near Seaforth. The partners had planned one, prior to the construction of Richmond. It was to have been named Glen Ossa. The names of J.S. Avery, F.T. Amhurst, William Hyne and Sir John Macartney were later rumoured as associates. Such rumours could easily have arisen from the fact that planters and potential planters examined every nook and cranny of the coastal lands between Mackay and Proserpine in the 1870's and saw plantation sites, sometimes in unlikely places.

Regularly between the 1870's and the 1930's Port Newry was mooted as a major port — even Mackay's port. Selectors' leases of 80 acres were surveyed about 1887 but there were no applicants. Finlayson had even contacted E.S. Rawson (then back in England permanently) about raising English capital to fund a port but Rawson was wary to the point of discouragement. He had had his fingers burnt trying to raise English capital for the North Queensland Sugar Estates Company Ltd. on The Hollow lands in the mid and later eighties. Rumour linked E.M. Long with Finlayson's hopes but Long, shortly before he became first Mackay Harbour Board chairman, told a Homebush meeting he had no practical connection with the scheme. He merely framed a report at Finlayson's request.<sup>26</sup>

The *Mercury* said: "Nothing can come of it. Port Newry remains where it is — a pleasant place for a picnic". Seaforth began to develop as a tourist resort after 1923. The area did not finally produce cane until 1963, after Farleigh's Wagoora tramline extension was built.

A sample of Seaforth tales is amusing and informative. *Mercury* letter writer "Old Hand" was cutting sleeper timber in 1884 for Mackay's first railway. "We drifted to Scrubby Creek near Port Newry where Captain Adrian in the *Waterlily* picked us up", he wrote.

Adrian would meet George Halliday at Seaforth Station where Halliday usually picked up meat by arrangement with Sylvester Fraser (manager). "Old Hand" later "drifted down to Brandon's country near Mt. Jukes, then owned by Cash and Avery". He recalled that Avery had just built Coningsby and "was looking ahead".

"Then we went on to Forest Hill and the home of Sir John Macartney. It was unusual to let a month go by without spending a week with Mr. Halliday. Surveyor Celestin Dupuy had selected a block next to Halliday's and to comply with residential requirements he usually went out at weekends, so we were a party of half a dozen or more." He added that Sylvester Fraser and Robert Martin were frequent guests.

Halliday's stone house, the ruined walls of a small stone cottage, originally called Bell Brook, is today a tourist landmark at Halliday's Bay, near Cape Hillsborough.

The occasional weekend visitors watched it go up, tier by tier. George Halliday was an engineer who had knocked about the world. He collected stones and burned stones and coral for mortar and hauled his materials to the house site by sled and wheelbarrow. In 1885 the walls were up and a thatched roof fitted.

This happy period was brief. "In 1885 Daniel Burke, who had a selection in the gorge between Mt. Blackwood and Mt. Jukes, disappeared in suspicious circumstances. His horse was found hobbled on the selection and the house ransacked", "Old Hand" wrote. Later rumours connected Burke's disappearance with David Harvey Holmes of Alligator Creek (St. Helens area) who committed suicide in his cell in December 1891 while being held on suspicion of having murdered a traveller, William McDonald. A connection seems unlikely but "Old Hand" says the Burke incident scared other selectors away from the Mt. Jukes–Seaforth area. In 1887 Finlayson was still living at Seaforth. George Halliday had gone. Sir John Macartney and a Mr. Bosse were the only other landholders in residence. A Mr. Blont had gone, allegedly scared off by the Burke affair and Leopold and Albert Groth were preparing to leave.<sup>27</sup>

"Old Hand" added a postscript: "Last February (1924) Halliday's property was sold for back rates. It realised £5, not even the price of the survey".28

George Halliday died in Melbourne in 1935.

J.H. Jamieson (who later selected an Inverness block) and Charles Romilly of Pleystowe (who had selected land close by the Seaforth run) were regulars at the Seaforth weekends. T.G. Mulherin related that it was customary to take turns in providing a demijohn of rum and when Halliday occasionally would claim that he had been eyed by a crocodile at Seaforth Creek he would be greeted with jibes from his companions that it was the effect of the rum. Once, by mistake, two demijohns turned up and it was claimed thereafter that Halliday affirmed that weekend he had been stalked by two crocodiles. H.L. (Harry) Ross (for many years managing director of J. Michelmore and Co. of Mackay and son of D.L. Ross of this history) "without making any claims at all for veracity", said that Gilbert Martin's "fishing trip" version had it that having been pursued to the very door of Bell Brook, George Halliday "left for Sydney and never came back".

More verifiable crocodile stories are plentiful. In March 1889 in Victor Creek a crocodile took a large lump of flesh from the shoulder of Finlayson's horse. The stirrup iron and leather appear to have deflected the saurian's snout upwards, saving Finlayson from a badly mauled leg. Earlier at St. Helens in a similar incident, R.W. Graham saw a crocodile take a piece out of his horse's shoulder.

<sup>1.</sup> This information was supplied by Mrs. W. White, one of Andrew Cumming's granddaughters. The word creole indicates pure ethnic stock of European settlers not, as it is often mistakenly taken to mean, a mixture of European and Negroid races.

<sup>2.</sup> Confirmed P.P. p 58.

<sup>3.</sup> D.M. 7-2-1910 and P.P. p 58.

<sup>4.</sup> Confirmed in part P.P. p 58.

<sup>5.</sup> Confirmed D.M. Jubilee Issue 1912.

<sup>6.</sup> Related 1969 by James McCready.

<sup>7.</sup> M.M. 17-7-1878.

<sup>8.</sup> M.M. 7-4-1877; T.S.F.M. p 64; family records.

- 9. T.S.F.M. says 1,200 tons a day but probably meant this as the weekly capacity.
- 10. M.M. 11-3-1893.
- 11. Family records.
- 12. M.M. 19-11-1897 and 24-10-1891.
- 13. D.M. 7-2-1912.
- 14. P.P. p 69.
- 15. Mr. John Kerr gives date of Spiller's purchase as 1880.
- 16. M.M. 13-6-1874.
- 17. T.Q. 16-6-1883.
- 18. M.M. 2-3-1881 and 1-6-1881.
- 19. Remarks in brackets not included in 1889 Royal Commission evidence.
- 20. See Part nineteen "Inverness".
- 21. M.M. 29-6-1895.
- 22. Fordyce family records.
- 23. Queensland Politics over Sixty Years, by C.A. Bernays.
- 24. D.M. 9-9-1933.
- 25. See Part seventeen "River Estate" and Part thirty "Habana".
- 26. M.M. 9-2-1897.
- 27. Spellings of Bosse and Blont are doubtful.
- 28. D.M. 3-5-1924.

## Part twenty-two

# MT. PLEASANT

The stories of Mt. Pleasant and Coningsby focus attention on conflicting philosophies of sugar production and investment in the 1880's. The two were the smaller two of four "smaller" North Side mills built in the eighties. The other two were Richmond and Beaconsfield.

The action of Thomas Pearce and W.G. Hodges in 1884-85, which in 1887-88, produced the first two Government backed Central Mills (North Eton and Racecourse) was triggered largely by a group of Eton growers who decided to build their own small mill because they considered the cane price paid by the Mackay Sugar Company's Victoria Mill was too low. This and the idea behind similar schemes sprang in part from an over simple belief that mill ownership would direct to the grower the cream of the sugar producing process; but small mills were not the answer.

Even in the heady boom of the early eighties size came tentatively as millers felt their way toward bigness. The C.S.R. Company at Homebush began with a "very big" mill in 1883. Farleigh and Habana both began with one crushing unit. Homebush never had more than two, albeit in a plant vastly superior to other local factories.

Sugar recovery techniques which had proved profitable at Foulden, Pioneer and River Estate in the seventies, were less than adequate to cope with the additional impurities produced by more efficient juice extraction in the eighties. By the time it became clear, in the nineties, that rigorous crushing aided by maceration (use of water to help remove the maximum of juice from crushed fibres) and a highly sophisticated "back end" for sugar recovery were essential to survival, all but one (Palmyra) of Mackay district's small mills had closed.

In an industry which took an over sanguine view of sugar prospects in the early eighties, men like W.S.C. Adrian and J.S. Avery probably took an even more sanguine view of prospects for small mills. Even so they could not have forseen the grievous hazards which beset them — drought, declining land productivity and crop vigour and the threat of loss of the only workforce they believed they could rely on.

Many farmers were considering even smaller mills. The Victor Mill and Gook Evaporator, for farms up to 200 acres had been tried with limited success on the Logan River. J.E. Davidson warily urged farmers to try it out thoroughly before risking much money. James Muggleton, whose name recurs frequently in local history after his meeting with John Mackay on Denison Creek in September 1862, was deputed by a meeting in October 1883 to investigate this apparatus on the Clarence River and elsewhere in New South Wales.<sup>1</sup>

An even smaller plant, Buchanan's Patent Steam Mill, was also considered, which did not require fixed foundations; but circumstances and sober assessment led to the conclusion that the district's millers were not so rapacious that these small outfits could be regarded as suitable farmer alternatives. Both Mt. Pleasant and Coningsby drew cane from neighbouring farms. James Willett was one of Mt. Pleasant's first suppliers. Mt. Pleasant was built by W.S.C. Adrian in 1883 close to Jane's Creek, near its entry to the Gooseponds.

Adrian was a colourful character with a reputation, somewhat over-embellished by legend, for a certain irascibility. He had skippered the W.H. Paxton steamship recruiter *Jabbawalk*. He ran Tattersalls Hotel and also the Victoria Hotel and in June 1877 acquired a bakery at Foulden. He held property in the Sarina area (Louisa Creek) to which he retired after he left Mt. Pleasant in the early 1890's.<sup>2</sup>

In August 1883 during construction, a two ton vacuum pan crashed onto a freshly laid engine bed causing damage costing £2,000. It was a bad setback. Sugar content in the cane was good and most of the other district mills were under way. Nindaroo started that day. The size of the pan and the amount of the damage indicates Adrian's was a substantial "small" mill. By comparison Lloyd and Walker spent £2,000 initially on the whole of the Dumbleton plant a decade earlier.

Philip Kirwan has recorded a curious tale of Adrian wilfully firing some of his paddocks in exasperation after the vacuum pan accident. Whatever the truth of that was (for the tale gained in drama with numerous retellings), Mt. Pleasant was remembered as having been well run in both field and mill.

It was said that bad weather and the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney closed Adrian down. An incorrect belief that the "bad weather" was in fact the 1888

drought and that the mill closed in 1887 has been put right by John Kerr who has established that the mill closed after its 1886 crushing, which continued into January 1887. Wet weather had caused a very difficult season. The closure, ordered from head office was said to have caused embarrassment to local manager E.P. Ashdown as well as distress to Captain Adrian, for the two were friends. It also distressed local farmers. William Archer at River Estate close by was not keen to take outside cane and Mt. Pleasant suppliers were faced with a long haul by dray to Beaconsfield. Activity on the estate in 1889, which led to later belief that the mill may have crushed that year, probably involved removal of remaining profitable ratioon cane to Beaconsfield.

Suggested reasons for precipitate closures such as occurred at Mt. Pleasant and The Cedars indicate a fertile field for inquiry in the story of Queensland sugar investment. One widely held belief was that these abrupt closures did not necessarily mean the enterprises involved were on the verge of collapse, but that financial houses with heavy sugar commitments were "running scared" at Premier Griffith's 1885 decision to stop Islander recruiting after 1890.

After prices fell in 1884, lenders became resigned to the fact that sugar investment would at best be a long term business and just when that term could have been expected to end, that is in the early nineties, the industry was to be deprived of its only known reliable workforce.

The Adrians were still at Mt. Pleasant in early 1890. Mrs. Adrian was lucky not to have been a victim of the *Quetta* disaster of 28th February 1890. She had booked her passage but had changed her mind shortly before the sailing date. Captain Adrian died in 1893.

In 1898 a brewing and ice making company was operating in the old mill building, under the direction of Mr. W.T. Kemp.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> M.M. 26-7-1879; 6-10-1883.

<sup>2.</sup> *Jabbawalk* was sister ship to *Borough Belle* of which Capt. Belbin was killed by Islanders at Ambrym on 24th July 1883; the Hotel Whitsunday (Cnr. Victoria and Macalister Streets) now stands on the Victoria Hotel site; the Ambassador Hotel (Sydney Street) stands on the Tattersalls site; bakery ref. M.M. 14-7-1877.

<sup>3.</sup> M.M. recent issue after 18-8-1883.

<sup>4.</sup> P.P. p 100; E.P. Ashdown was Mackay's first C.B.C. manager 1873-89.

<sup>5.</sup> M.M. 15-9-1898.

## Part twenty-three

# CONINGSBY

John S. Avery began establishing another plantation about the time of the disposal of Miclere in 1881. He had accumulated large areas on the North Side between Farleigh and The Leap and in the Mt. Jukes area further northwards. On the former (700 acres) he built a mill and formed a plantation named Coningsby, after a book with that title written by Lord Beaconsfield. Coningsby school, Wundaru rail siding and the White family residence mark the location.

The mill is believed to have first crushed in 1883. William McMahon recorded a local belief that it only crushed for two seasons but a *Mercury* report of 3rd December 1887 says that Coningsby, Nindaroo and other plantations were then trying to carry on with white labour.

The machinery came from Scotland. The plantation resembled Beaconsfield or Mt. Pleasant with a mill capacity of about 400 tons. Avery cultivated 220 acres. He hoped to secure supplies from farms which otherwise would have had to wait for Ashburton to open in 1884. These were in the Mandurana, Hunter's Hill, Norwood and The Ridges area. He appears to have expected 500 tons of sugar from his first crop.<sup>2</sup>

The mill appears to have contained construction faults. One eye witness recalled that viewed from a distance the flywheel had a distinct wobble. Whether this was a temporary or a basic fault is not known. From his record at Miclere, Avery seems to have been able to maintain a "tight ship" so it is unusual that this fault was so apparent unless he was running some kind of calculated risk.

This may have been a contributing cause of the mill's final mishap, which, according to the North Side "collective memory", occurred early in the 1888 crushing. The date seems correct, given the 1887 press report and the belief that the A.J.S. Bank foreclosed in 1889. Several of Avery's supplying farms did not grow cane for a break of a few years after 1889.

A spur wheel cracked and finally broke. One report suggests that when the crack occurred, full pressure had to be applied to the remaining two rollers, with unsatisfactory crushing results. Another indicates that pressure was taken off the rollers when the crack developed, with equally poor results.

Another eye witness report, but whether of this incident or of another is not clear, describes John Avery picking a half crushed stalk from the back of the rollers and ruefully shaking his head.

When the break came, Avery cabled Glasgow for a replacement but it did not arrive until December and very little sugar was made that year. A lot of stand-over cane was left for the next season and much of it was burned or destroyed. Estate activity has been recalled in the Christmas-New Year period of 1888-89 but none afterwards.<sup>3</sup>

The broken spur wheel lay on the mill site, beside the abandoned brick stack until well into the new century. The flywheel well for many years was used as a cattle dip. The stack was demolished in the later 1940's, when it became unsafe.

The estate's brief life corresponded with the "boom and bust" period of the eighties. For part of the period the plantation overseer was John Keefe. Avery built a double storied residence with six upstairs rooms surrounded by wide verandahs and a large detached kitchen. The home was set in spacious tree planted grounds. The house (later altered) and trees are visible still from the Bruce Highway, the home of present (1982) chairman of Pioneer Shire Council, Cr. Gordon White.

Among the suppliers was Robert Martin (formerly of Hamilton) who had 500 acres of freehold at Mandurana. He grew cane from 1880 to 1889 and then missed five seasons. Drought and failure of Coningsby are believed to have been the reasons he stopped. He started again in 1894 and had 10 acres in 1895 to go to Farleigh. He ran 200 head of cattle and 22 horses and cultivated 100 acres.<sup>4</sup>

Another local grower was Swiss-born Clements Knobel who had arrived in Bowen in the 1860's. He came to the North Side from Clermont in 1881 and settled on 100 acres adjoining Avery which he called Sunnyhill. Sunnyhill homestead was described as a "commodious six roomed woodlined iron house with large verandahs, large detached kitchen, brick boilerhouse, iron storehouse, large garden, two men's houses, Kanaka quarters, nine stall stables, tool house and blacksmith shop.<sup>5</sup>

Knobel's dairy was at least as large an operation as his cane. After Coningsby closed his cane went to Farleigh or Ashburton, and he leased 400 acres of Coningsby from Henry Brandon, who had acquired the property.

By 1895 he ran 250 head of cattle, milked 40 cows a day and produced from 40 to 70 lbs. of butter a week. He sold milk and eggs in town. He had 203 acres at The Leap which was undeveloped in 1895. The 400 acre lease was known as "Brandon's" or "Brandon's paddock" for many years.

Knobel's two sons, Alfred and Frederick both learned sugar boiling in their teens and worked at various North Side mills. Both gained early experience at Foulden, having paid £50 to learn from two Mauritius trained Frenchmen. Alfred later worked for 23 years as a sugar boiler at Pioneer on the Burdekin.<sup>7</sup>

Frederick, the younger of the two, was born at Mackay in 1873. As well as sugar boiling he was a contract ploughman for Ashburton and Farleigh. Sunnyhill was his home until he retired well into the next century. He became a provisional director of Farleigh when the Farleigh Co-operative Sugar Milling Association was formed in 1926.

The balance of the estate, 300 acres which contained the house and the mill, were leased by William Peach. He had 80 acres under cane and 20 acres put to pasture in 1895. Odd bits of machinery marked the mill site. He employed five white men and no Islanders. His family of 10 helped on the property. Peach had left a 246 acres freehold property in the Jolimont area in the early nineties to come to Coningsby.<sup>8</sup>

The Peach family were followed by the family of Thomas White who moved on to the property in 1902. Thomas White was a Scottish engineer and was one of several British plantation staff and workmen E.M. Long made continuous efforts to attract to Habana. White's first Mackay district position was at Habana. He was subsequently an engineer of Cattle Creek and Farleigh. He is believed to have assisted in preparing Farleigh to crush in 1905 after the 1901 closure, but his full-time professional connection was then with Cattle Creek. The homestead grounds were then clearly laid out on the pattern the Averys had established. The entrance was marked by a large

clump of bamboos which remained on the "Bowen Road" until recent realignment of the Bruce Highway meant resumption of part of the White property.

Family friendships with the Martins and family relationships among the White, Koch and Macartney families are part of a lively social tradition of the area, particularly before closer settlement by new Farleigh farmers gained pace during the 1920's.

The Coningsby breakdown highlights a milling hazard which caused problems throughout the colony, especially with overseas plant. Thus Frank Neame of Macknade (on the Herbert River) wrote to the *Mercury* in 1882: "I would be obliged if any of your readers would inform me if it is a matter of common occurrence in Mackay mills, to break the shafts of the mill rollers during crushing operations and if mill owners as a rule keep a spare roller in case of accidents. We had the misfortune last year . . . . . to break the shaft in the top roller in one mill and were delayed six weeks in getting it repaired".

Neame said other plantations considered this unusual but that Mirlees, Tait and Watson advised it was a common occurrence and suggested carrying a spare. "I am anxious to know if this is customary with mills by other makers or is it a specialty with Mirlees, Tait and Watson. Our mill rollers are 48 ins. by 24 ins. erected in 1873".9

The *Mercury* replied that it was not a common accident, nor was it customary to carry a spare. It suggested perhaps Mirlees, Tait and Watson may have referred to West Indies mills. Nevertheless E.M. Long carried extensive spares at Habana and carried a register of availability of parts.

Coningsby was a lively centre of North Side life. The State school saw to the early education of several prominent Farleigh personalities, including T.G. Mulherin. The Anglican church of St. Peter's at Mandurana, a short distance out along the Bowen road, was identified in many people's minds with the area. Twice, when funds were needed for the church, Mrs. Robert Martin wrote her old friend Nellie Armstrong — later Dame Nellie Melba — and each time a generous donation came back. The district provided spirited membership of the P.R.F.G.A., the U.C.G.A. and the A.S.P.A. and of official and unofficial farmers' committees which culminated first in Queensland Producers' Association committees after 1923 and Mill Suppliers' Committees of the Queensland Cane Growers' Association after 1926. In the early years, 22 members at a meeting was not unusual, a good local roll-up in any era.

Long after Coningsby closed, derogatory references to the mill as a "coffee pot" were not well received among an older generation. As one old timer put it "no one spoke badly of the Averys after the war". (Indeed it is doubtful if the Averys were ever referred to "badly".) Research has provided an explanation for the remark and a sad postcript.

Three Avery sons served in World War I. One was a Medical Officer. Of the others Captain Wilfred was fatally wounded on 25th April 1917 and Private Reginald killed in action on 4th April 1918. (The same file of local personal details contains the name of Dick Lloyd, elder son of A.H. Lloyd of Dumbleton killed in action with the Australian Flying Corps.)

<sup>1.</sup> D.M. articles December 1925.

<sup>2.</sup> Oral recollections; M.M. May 1883; See Part thirty-eight "Mansions and Earth Floors".

- 3. Various oral recollections and D.M. 15-8-1910.
- 4. Oral recollections; T.S.F.M. p 31.
- 5. T.S.F.M. pp 30-31.
- 6. T.S.F.M. pp 30-31.
- 7. John Drysdale of the Burdekin by Roy Connolly, Index p 207.
- 8. T.S.F.M. p 31 and oral recollections.
- 9. M.M. 25-3-1882.

## Part twenty-four

# **BEACONSFIELD**

#### Henderson — Croker

Mackay's pioneer storekeeper, Andrew Henderson, established Beaconsfield plantation on 800 acres of forest land, separated from Inverness by a chain road. The mill was being built at the same time as Ashburton, which puts its first crushing at probably 1884. By 1888, 284 acres were ready for cane but Henderson told the 1889 Royal Commission the 1888 crop made only 45 tons of sugar from 114 acres. He had £29,000 invested.

Henderson had owned a store near the Hermitage bridge (today's Hospital Bridge) in the 1870's but this was not his first Mackay business. G.F. Bridgman traces his early connections with the district. In 1862 a Mr. Wilmot owned Cardowan and Newstead runs. Henderson was overseer on the latter. Wilmot and Henderson visited Mackay in 1862.

When Bridgman visited the port in early December: "There were a few tents and temporary iron humpies. Henderson owned a long, low, temporary iron erection with an earth floor, where a visitor could purchase a shirt and pair of trousers, be provided with a meal and even liquid refreshment". Ling Roth says this was built about 19th September 1862. Henderson did not then have a liquor licence but was in the first group of Mackay traders to secure one. He became the licensee of the Royal Hotel. Bridgman continues: "Edward Cridland, who had been sent from Fort Cooper to receive their stores and ship their wool was putting up a slab and shingle structure nearby".

James Robb, Henderson's nephew, who lived at Beaconsfield in 1912 (he had returned from a mining venture at Cape River and Charters Towers in 1910) said in 1912 that Henderson's was one of the first Mackay marriages (celebrated by Bishop



Beaconsfield mill late 1880's. Photo: John Oxley Library.

Wyndham about mid-December 1863), but Ling Roth says the first wedding was that of Frank Kinchant to a sister of the Martin brothers of Hamilton.

After Long Brothers acquired River Estate, (pioneered by Henderson, see Part 17), Andrew Henderson grew cane on a block of about 50 acres near The Lagoons (near the 1982 Mackay's waterworks). Nearby James Robb had a horse mill with vertical rollers. A rickety bridge linked Robb to William Hyne's Balmoral mill. Hyne crushed Henderson's cane. Henderson maintained extensive grazing interests including Heidelberg after it was relinquished by Emilius Hifling. He raised horses and cattle on a large block at Wallingford.

Only 360 acres of Beaconsfield were ploughed. The mill could make 500 tons of sugar. It had one set of triple rollers 42 in. by 22 in., sulphur box, steam clarifiers with copper coils, 500 gallon cleaning pans, an 800 gallon steam concentrator, four subsiders of 1,000 gallons each, one three ton vacuum pan and three suspended centrifugals. Two 12 ft. by 6 ft. boilers powered an 18 inch cylinder steam engine with a 2 ft. 6 in. stroke. The mill house was 158 ft. by 32 ft. with wings 51 ft. by 30 ft. The residence stood half a mile from the mill in large grounds. In 1893, 30 white men and 55 Melanesians were employed. The mill made 400 tons of sugar in 1892 and then Henderson seems to have stopped both cultivation and crushing. He intended installing a second set of rollers and had extra ground lying fallow with the idea of encouraging farmers into a small central mill complex, but the economic hazards of the nineties proved too formidable and the plantation remained closed.<sup>2</sup>

J.C. Penny, Farleigh manager from 1904 to 1908 bought 703 acres of the estate on 18th November 1909 and sold to prominent Mackay businessman James Croker on 22nd April 1911. By December 1915, with F.J. McLennan (formerly of the C.S.R. Company) as farm manager, 250 acres were cultivated. James Croker arranged with Farleigh Estate Sugar Co. manager, James McGown, that Farleigh would extend the River Estate tramline beyond the Inverness boundary on Croker's undertaking to try to maintain adequate cane supplies. The crop was hauled off Beaconsfield paddocks on portable tramlines. With crops of around 2,500 and one of almost 5,000 tons, James Croker became Farleigh's largest supplier.<sup>3</sup>

The paddocks contained legacies of the past. Henderson, in the beginning, ring-barked larger trees and ploughed among them. Croker's ploughmen struck roots bypassed 30 years before. The old trees had been burned and winched but the roots did not burn easily and had resisted decay. A later Beaconsfield manager was J.C. Galletly who subsequently selected a pioneering block (supplying Pleystowe Mill) at Mt. Pelion on part of the old St. Helens run after the area was thrown open in 1922.

James How Croker was born at Cundleton, New South Wales in 1859, the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Croker of Dykehead station in the Burnett district. He first worked for Parbury, Lamb and Co. in Brisbane. This firm often acted as agent for the C.S.R. Company, so Croker gained early professional experience in the top echelons of the Australian sugar industry. He came to Mackay in 1881 to join the staff of W.H. Paxton who had left Wm. Sloane and Co. to set up his own business in 1876.

Capital was then beginning to pour into the district. The ground rules of the local sugar export business were still being laid and James Croker was to write many of them himself. He was a Racecourse mill shareholder later. Beaconsfield was but one of his many connections with the sugar industry.

After a few years with Paxton, Croker saw one of his colleagues gain promotion to a job he knew he could handle and realising the limited prospects for promotion in a small office in a small and remote town, he decided to open his own business. In 1889 he set up business principally as a sugar broker but also as trader and agent, and so joined the ranks of such early local traders, brokers, agents and investors as George Smith, W.H. Paxton, R.J. Jeffray (Wm. Sloane and Co.) and J.R. Palfreyman (Burns Bassett and Co.). With their colleagues in the other sugar towns these entrepreneurs add their own facet to the early planting story.

Until the C.S.R. Company purchased part of the district's sugar make, individual local mills developed reputations for different types of sugars; but it was difficult to place small quantities and to time their shipment. Independent action without a shrewd and financially secure broker was fraught with such hazards as price drops during transit or in-store deterioration. One of the lighter memories of the family womenfolk was of making small cloth sample bags for despatch to prospective buyers in the early years of James Croker's promotional activities.

In 1890 he married Miss E.K. Walker, daughter of the Charles Walkers of Dumbleton. A.H. Lloyd had married Charles Walker's sister and so James Croker, who added real estate to a growing list of business activities, had an early personal interest in North Side sugar lands. He had a hand in either the management or subsequent disposal — or both — of many plantation blocks, including Dumbleton, The Ridges (home of Messrs. Gilbert and Rowland Turner and their mother, Mrs.

E.M. Turner), Wainai and the Richmond area blocks owned by F.W. Poolman of McBryde, Finlayson and Co.

Mackay was not the most popular port on the coast. The river had severe limitations and lightering cargoes to and from the deepwater anchorage at Flat Top was an irksome process coastal skippers reluctantly lived with. James Croker helped to convince the Adelaide Steamship Company of the wisdom of securing and so centrally controlling all local sugar exports. For 50 years from 1891 to 1940, when the Adelaide Company set up its own Mackay office, his firm handled the whole of the Mackay sugar out turn, as agents for the company.

James Croker died in 1927. From 1925 until 1943 his son, Raymond, handled sugar shipping and won lasting goodwill among all participants in a difficult process. It involved coping with increasing output from seven mills and railway scheduling between mills and the river wharves. Transfers to lighters and then to ships anchored at Flat Top had to be scheduled according to tides and sailing timetables. Plane Creek sugar was taken by tramway to a wharf at Louisa Creek and thence by lighter to Flat Top.<sup>4</sup>

James Croker is believed to have delivered his last Beaconsfield crop to Farleigh in 1922 or 1923. (Farleigh Estate Sugar Company Ltd. records of the period have not survived). About that period sales of Beaconsfield lands were made which resulted finally in F.C. Mittelheuser owning 416 acres and J. (Jack) Camilleri and M. (Mick) Deguara 274 acres. Title passed to the respective owners within a few weeks of each other in 1936. Other small sections were disposed of individually. The books of the Croker Estate were closed on a smaller area of freehold to Jack Camilleri and Joe Ellul on 30th June 1931. This smaller area is likely to have comprised most of the balance of 750 acres James Croker is believed to have acquired of the original Beaconsfield estate, although it was not bought from J.C. Penny.<sup>5</sup>

The firm of James Croker and Sons pioneered distribution of fuels and fertilisers, branched into the motor trade and is involved in large scale steel handling and general merchandising.

In 1909 James Croker engaged builder Harry Hills to put up a large family home he named Bona Vista, on what had been called Ryan's Hill, but which subsequently became known as Croker's Hill. It replaced an earlier home built by Patrick Ryan. Though it was built after the "planter" era, Bona Vista remains today one of the few tangible links with the social history of Mackay's planter past.

From the 1870's onwards, North Queensland developed what visitors recalled as a distinctive style of hospitality, not necessarily better nor worse than that of other Australian communities; but it had special features, born of isolation and climate and of the nature of tough, capable "well connected" businessmen and settlers who were able to adapt their training, background and temperaments to make a satisfying life in the remote North.

At Mackay the names of prominent homes became identified with the type of hospitality which visitors and old residents remembered. It reflected a nineteenth century stratified society tempered substantially by a developing North Queensland egalitarianism, not necessarily lavish, nor ostentatious, but "cultured", openhearted and generous. Such homes were the Davidson residence at Alexandra in the seventies and at Branscombe in the eighties and nineties and the Rawson residences at The Hollow and Mackay in the same period; G.N. Marten's Winterbourne in the seventies

and G.H. Maitland King's home at Branscombe in the seventies and eighties; Spiller's Pioneer House in the later seventies; E.V. Reid's Fryerne in the eighties and The Folly, home of George Smith in the eighties and early nineties. Mackay's social history would list many more. At the end of this era, when ocean going passenger ships often anchored at Flat Top, James Croker became host to many important national and international figures.

Overseas visitors up to the start of World War II expressed surprise at the heavy work regimen North Queensland's leading citizens managed to sustain, while at the same time maintaining a "social" style of living, which in other countries seemed to develop into a full time occupation.

The Croker family disposed of Bona Vista after World War II. It has become a major venue for catered social functions, not inappropriate to one of the last tangible reminders of an earlier distinctive style of North Queensland gracious living.<sup>6</sup>

- 1. D.M. Jubilee Edition 1912; Port Mackay by H. Ling Roth; reminiscences by Jas. Robb.
- 2. T.S.F.M. p 13.
- 3. Property transactions documented by Mr. Rowan Croker; F.E.S. Co. arrangements detailed by W.R. Denman and C. McGown chief and assistant cane inspectors; see also A.S.J. December 1915.
- 4. See Mackay Harbour Story by H.A. Moore.
- 5. Estate disposal details courtesy Mr. Rowan Croker.
- 6. Relate this picture to Part thirty-eight "Mansions and Earth Floors".

## Part twenty-five

## NEBIA

Nebia, which became one of the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Company plantations, through a finance arrangement between Chas. Fitzsimmons and Wm. Sloane and Co. has one major connection with the Farleigh story, the link being the irrepressible Philip Kirwan. Kirwan owned Portion 57 and, predictably was in the van of a growers' argument with the management of Pleystowe mill early in this century. He was told if he did not desist in certain actions his cane was not wanted. He arranged to supply Farleigh. The bulk of the old Nebia lands today supply Pleystowe.

One of Nebia's managers was a colourful local sugar identity, Richard Dempsey (Dolly) Dunne. Like his younger friend Kirwan, he was proud of his Irish stock but in sugar matters and most public affairs the two were ideological opposites. Wags tagged

Dunne the Irish Tory and Kirwan the Irish firebrand socialist, a situation the two acknowledged with good humour.

Dunne worked for seven years, from 1866, on Lotus Creek station, which, on the early pioneering track to the North was the first run after the exhausting razorbacks of the Conners Range. The owner was Charles Fitzsimmons who had been first member for Port Curtis in the Queensland Parliament and who had been partner in a run on the Mackenzie River, called Nebia.

In 1872-73, Fitzsimmons, having sold Lotus Creek and gone down to Mackay to make sugar, asked Dunne to work for him. He had selected a square mile of country which he called Nebia, across the river from Branscombe and separated from Dumbleton by Gladfield Estate, owned in the early years of North Side plantation development by John McBryde, later of Richmond. Some of the capital was provided by a sleeping partner in Ireland, D. Gaussen. Fitzsimmons borrowed also from Dunne.

After the 1875 rust setback, according to Dunne, Wm. Sloane and Co. "came to help", a euphemism for a permanent foot inside the management door. Hugh McCready was appointed inspector of the property. At the same time W.H. Paxton was the company's local representative. Fitzsimmons died in 1876 with the Nebia debt to Wm. Sloane and Co. standing at £4000. R.D. Dunne was appointed manager under supervision of both McCready and Paxton.

When Wm. Sloane and Co., following the bankruptcy of T.H. Fitzgerald, took over Te Kowai and made McCready manager, they sent Louis Duval, a Frenchman from Mauritius, to report on both Te Kowai and Nebia. Duval's report recommended dismissal of McCready and Dunne and appointment of a general manager for Te Kowai and a sub-manager for Nebia.

R.D. Dunne wrote: "The managing partner of Wm. Sloane and Co. would not agree to McCready's dismissal but agreed to mine and gave the management to Duval under a four year contract. McCready was instructed to dismiss me but he knew I had loaned Fitzsimmons money and he knew I would not give up possession until I was paid". The managing partner was John Ewen Davidson.

Dunne had no plan of action until 15 Kanakas objected to working under the Frenchman. They called him "Man wee wee". (The French word for "yes" is "oui", pronounced "wee" and Duval had a habit of punctuating his conversations with "Oui, oui".)

Dunne recalled: "The 15 Kanakas agreed to duck the Frenchman in the river for as long as I told them". McCready and Duval visited Nebia but would not recognise Dunne's claim. Dunne recalled: "I told the boys to duck the Frenchman and if McCready interfered to duck him too". The islanders chased Duval through a barbed wire fence and fearing he would be drowned, McCready had to assure both the "boys" and Dunne that Duval would go away and not return.

Wm. Sloane and Co. later promised Dunne his money if he stayed on with Duval for six months. Dunne agreed and Duval moved in with him at Nebia. Predictably the arrangement was not satisfactory and Dunne resigned. As noted in the River Estate story, he ran the mill there in 1877.

Hugh McCready and Dunne respected one another. McCready had recommended Dunne to George Raff as the man to set up Cassada for the Donaldson brothers. Dunne also managed Palmyra during one of McCready's trips to Britain. He spent some time in Fiji and was manager of The Barrie for several years.

In fairness to Duval it should be recorded that he was regarded as a good professional sugar man. In 1877 he was local representative of Messrs. John Hart and Co. who were Brisbane agents for the Icery monosulphite sugar recovery process.<sup>2</sup>

The bulk of the Nebia lands were bought by A.H. Tideman and then by Charles McKinley. The mill site of the old plantation is still occupied by a McKinley family member Mr. Ernie Leach. Mrs. Leach is the daughter, Carmel, of St. Helens sugar pioneer P.J. McDermott of Kolijo. Some of the land was turned over to dairying by Mr. Doug. Williams who was the first dairyman in Mackay district to install a rotary milking machine.

## Part twenty-six

# **FARMERS**

#### Dharru

Dharru was not the name of a plantation. It was the name of a fine liqueur beverage which had its origins in the West Indies. Andrew Cumming knew it well and is believed to have brought the basic recipe to Mackay with him. Edward Denman also knew it well and turned the recipe to commercial account at Etowrie.

Denman considered himself a "farmer" rather than a "planter" and was one of the more than 100 farmers who at various times supplied the North Side mills of the plantation era.

These included raw "new chums", as W.T. Paget confessed to have been, or men like J. Birditt of Wolston (leased from Edward Denman and which supplied Habana), with a farming background in the "old country". J.M. Costello, Spiller's staff officer, had spent three years at Glasnevin College, Dublin and had had earlier experience of coffee plantations when he commenced growing coffee at Millicent. Some of the farmers brought with them "old country" practises not common in Queensland; H.J. Jane enclosed paddocks with substantial stone walls. J. Birditt gave an old world priority to making sure his young cane was completely free of weeds when others tended to rely on the vigour of the cane stools to outgrow the weeds.

<sup>1.</sup> R.D. Dunne, four columns of reminiscenses D.M. 24-12-1922.

<sup>2.</sup> M.M. 11-8-1877.



Edward Denman. Photo: Denman family.

Jane grew cane first in 1874 and supplied Miclere (the name having been recently changed from Dulverton). He later supplied Foulden and had 180 acres of cane for Farleigh when that mill opened in 1883. The repudiation of contracts, already dealt with, (Part 10) led Jane to restrict permanently his cane lands to about 60 acres and he considered cane growing to be auxiliary to his butchery business, which he established in 1872.

A tally of growers supplying Richmond, Beaconsfield and Mt. Pleasant would have approached 40. Many of the Richmond suppliers switched to Nindaroo and some to Habana after Richmond closed in mid 1895. Some went out of cane growing. In early 1903 when no mill was left open on the North Side, Edward Denman said he could recall 87 farmers supplying Nindaroo and Habana. To that figure must be added another 30 who at various times had supplied Farleigh and a few more who ceased growing cane when Beaconsfield, Mt. Pleasant and Coningsby closed.

These eastern area growers formed a lively Nindaroo branch of the P.R.F.A. and P.R.F.G.A. It was a counterpart to the equally vigorous Coningsby branch on the western side.

Etowrie is the only North Side property still in the hands of the original selector's family. Aboriginal for "a good place to camp", the name has proved particularly apt for the Denman family. Edward Denman's writings, reminiscent, argumentative and always informative, are an invaluable record of sugar and local affairs during his 51 years at Etowrie. At times his Press letters were rambling epistles but he rambled with humour and perception.

He had several years' experience of coloured plantation labour in the West Indies before arriving in Mackay. At Mackay he worked with Robert Bridgman in an endeavour to better the lot of detribalised Aboriginals and was respected by his Melanesian workforce. The scope of his association with the Queensland sugar industry is apparent from the recurrent references to him throughout this book. Two of his sons, W.R. (Bill) and A.C. (Alan), became Farleigh mill directors and his

grandson R.C. (Robert) is currently (1982) a director. Bill Denman was a Farleigh cane inspector for many years. Edward Denman and sons Alan and Bill, served on Pioneer Shire Council. Edward was chairman in 1917-18. He represented the Council on Mackay Harbour Board for three different terms between 1911 and 1927.

When Bill and his older brother Ned were scarcely more than lads, they volunteered for service in the Boer War, but the local recruiting authorities knew they were under age and rejected them. One of the Cumming boys (son of Andrew Cumming of Richmond) had already gone and another was accepted. Not to be outdone the Denmans left for Sydney and volunteered there where no one knew their age. They arrived in South Africa with the second contingent from Australia, ahead of their mates with whom they had tried to join up in Mackay.

In the mid 1890's an extensive Etowrie orchard contained 200 limes, 400 mangoes, 100 custard apples, 150 peach, 100 orange, pawpaws, Brazilian cherries and several other varieties in smaller numbers. The fruit was despatched to various points between Thursday Island and Melbourne. From these trees came the juices which gave Denman his Dharru blend.

Pulping fruits for the Dharru was a popular job with the Islanders. They derived great amusement from the behaviour of the pigs which were fed the skins and skimmings which were taken off the fermenting mixture at set stages of the heating process, or left when the finished "brew" was drawn off. Alan Denman has recalled: "They (the pigs) would wander round a bit drunk for hours after eating the stuff".

Mackay distilleries made good rum and many a discriminating drinker would ask for the "real Mackay", but Denman, from his professional connection with the liquor trade knew where a "top quality" rum came from and used Jamaica rum. After one particularly good decanting, Edward Denman sent a complimentary bottle to his neighbour, Rev. Fr. P.M. Bucas at what was later called Seaview and is now called Bucasia. A word of appreciation later came back — "A fine blend, Mr. Denman. I preached a very good sermon on Sunday".

Early in 1905 a revenue inspector named Gabriel impounded some of the Dharru for an alleged breach of excise laws. Denman went to Brisbane to contest the prosecution. He won but it cost him several hundred pounds, far more than the value of the rum. He later had the satisfaction of seeing his prosecutor declared guilty of defalcation which involved contamination of a cask of rum with cigar ash.

The next year (1906), Denman became involved in argument over Islander repatriation. He had been cut short by Mr. R.A. Ranking, chairman of the 1906 Royal Commission inquiring into repatriation of Melanesians, in an attempt to address the Commission. He particularly disagreed with C.F. Neilsen, a Commission member and Labour Party M.L.A. and subsequently entered vigorous debate with local Labour stalwart, Donald Beaton on the subject.

In one wide ranging argument Denman mentioned Scottish poet Robbie Burns adding — "there's an exciseman who would never have seized my Dharru", to which Beaton replied that the whole of Denman's ramblings on the subject were the result of too much Dharru.

Denman sold his recipe to spirit merchants, Neill and Nolan. Richard Neill was a considerable landowner in the Habana area. Neill's beach is named for him. At one period he was in charge of the Imperial Hotel in Victoria Street, which he planned to develop as a Planters' Club. Edward Denman was married to Jane, daughter of

Andrew Cumming. The family women folk, through involvement in church work had made a connection with Mrs. Harrison Lee then travelling the district for the Women's Christian Temperance Union giving "scientific" temperance lectures. Neill and Nolan placed a tongue in cheek advertisement in the Standard promoting Dharru, stating it had excellent medicinal properties and had the approval of the W.C.T.U.

J. Michelmore and Co. later took over the blending of the drink and marketed it as Pioneer Liqueur Rum. Many school leavers in the 1920's and 1930's had as their first job, dejuicing bush lemons to add to the blend. Sales were discontinued in the 1950's following difficulties involving the divulgence of ingredients under excise regulations.

Denman reduced the scale of his cane cultivation after 1884, due to difficulties in acquiring suitable labour. His militancy on the question of a just cane price was not as politically orientated as was the case with Philip Kirwan, but he deplored what he regarded as shortsightedness in millers who, he claimed, too often denied their mills adequate supplies of cane by not offering sufficient price incentive to growers. He had a vigorous disagreement with W.T. Paget at Nindaroo on cane price and let a sizeable crop stand in the field rather than deliver at an unacceptably low price. He then supplied Habana.

### Farleigh Suppliers

The following lists of Farleigh and Habana district canegrowers compiled by Aneas Munro for The Sugar Fields of Mackay, suggest that the North Side farming community of the 1890's was prosperous. Most of the settlers of more than four years' occupancy lived in comfortable homes with permanent white and Melanesian employees. Their crops, particularly at Habana, averaged several hundred tons and in numerous cases more than 1,000 tons. In the 1920's, when around 200 farmers supplied Farleigh from the North Side, 400 tons was a larger than average crop and in some years no more than six exceeded 1,000 tons. In 1925 and 1930 average crop sizes were even smaller. (See Part 48 "The Turbulent Years").

The earliest subdivisions of the Farleigh estates began on Miclere lands. Cane supplies from Farleigh farmers in the mid-nineties were considerably smaller than most from Habana growers, partly because the Farleigh men had arrived more recently and partly because the leases, generally, were smaller.

Farleigh lessees on Miclere in 1894 were:

J.T. O'Riordan — "Hore Farm", 56 acres; four roomed iron and timber house, thatched roof, thatched Malay quarters; occupancy seven months.

A. and J. Holzheimer — "Shoveham", 50 acres, five acres cane 1894, 22 more expected to be planted 1895.

G.F. Cox — "Southwick", 57 acres; grass house, Kanakas' humpy; occupancy six months.

F.J. McLeod — "Lancing Farm", 60 acres; grass house; occupancy four weeks.

F. Schumonski — "Portsada", 40 acres; two roomed palm house, thatched roof, detached kitchen; occupancy six months.

Adam Wendt — "Cliftonville", 55 acres; taking off 35 acres planted by Farleigh; iron and thatch cottage being replaced by better residence; stock one horse.

Murry and Desbois (incorrectly spelled Murray and Dubois) - "Kingston", 30 acres planted 1894; These partners ran this from a dairy farm close by (probably Craiglea), which had a five roomed house with verandah and detached kitchen; 46 cows were milked.

Two other Farleigh leases (both small) had just been taken. Fred Holmes leased 20 acres of Morley's paddock and Otto Mewing 50 acres in the same locality. Otto Mewing lived at Springvale in a "comfortable slab house" on 100 acres of freehold. Herman Mewing also had a "comfortable slab house" on 50 acres of freehold at Springvale. J. Hubner had a "nice dwelling" on 50 acres freehold at Springvale. The Mewings and Hubner had been in residence six months.

Other leases were: James Duncan — "Rosevale", 189 acres leased from Q.N. Bank; six roomed weatherboard house on 7 ft. piles; occupancy 5 years, average crop 500 tons. Shaw and Edwards — 22 acres leased from Mrs. E.M. Turner of "The Ridges"; 12 months occupancy. H. Brookes — 60 acres leased from Robert Martin of Mandurana; 10 acres cane; three roomed dwelling.

Other freeholders were: C. Knobel — "Sunnyhill" (See Part 23 "Coningsby"), W.M. Peach (See Part 23), Robert Martin — (See index and Part 23), P. Mulherin — "Avondale" (See index).

C. Hunter — "Hunters Hill" 357 acres on Pleystowe Road three miles from The Leap; 16 acres cane.

Mrs. E.M. Turner — "The Ridges" 357 acres freehold, 30 acres of cane mid 1880's, none in 1894.

Michael Flood — "Virginia" 1907 acres at Black Mountain, 1,367 acres freehold, 15 acres standing cane.

A substantial number of selectors were established in the area of The Leap at this time, sufficient to induce Frederick Bolton at Farleigh to anticipate in 1893, supplies in excess of 8,000 tons (See Part 15 "Years of Hope").

For Nindaroo suppliers see Part 29 "Nindaroo". River Estate, Pioneer, Foulden, Mt. Pleasant and Beaconsfield drew significant cane supplies from farmers at various times.

#### Habana Suppliers

Farms supplying Habana and leased from Habana in 1894 in 1894 were:

- J. Donnelly and J. Chidlow 96 acres, 83 acres under cane; four years occupancy.
- \_\_. Colenso "Acacia Vale", 54 acres, all cultivated; two years.
- W. McGregor 50 acres, 40 acres of cane; two years.
- \_\_. Simmonds 133 acres, 15 acres cane; one year.

Setter and Hannaford — 89 acres, 60 acres cane; five years.

R. Poole — "Binbirrie" 50 acres, near two tramways; four months.

H.H. Chataway — "Hill Side" (possibly freehold) 100 acres, 18 acres cane; four years.

Noble and Benning — "Shepherd's Flat", 50 acres with right of further leased area, 50 acres cane; three years.

W. Napier — "Weston Farm", 250 acres, 140 acres cane; 10 years.

Geo. Noble — "Rockwood", 90 acres, 80 acres cane; four years.

Donald Gordon — Raff's Selection, 52½ acres (40 leased from Habana 12½ from E. Denman, 42½ acres cane; six years.

James McGinn — Raff's Selection, 75 acres, all under cane; two years.

W.H. Brookes — "Stour Valley", 80 acres, 52 under cane.

E.T. Thatcher — "Amhurst Vale", 96 acres plus 80 acres grazing, 80 acres cane; six years.

J. Gallanty — "The Gorge", 162 acres all under cane; six years.

John Brackenbury — "The Wolds", 212 acres plus 30 acres grazing, 200 acres under cane; 4 years. John Brackenbury — "Barrow Hill", 290 acres, 60 acres under cane.

A Bartrup — "Barton Hill", 40 acres, 24 acres under cane; worked three years.

\_\_. Cross — "Avon Farm", 54 acres, 38 acres under cane.

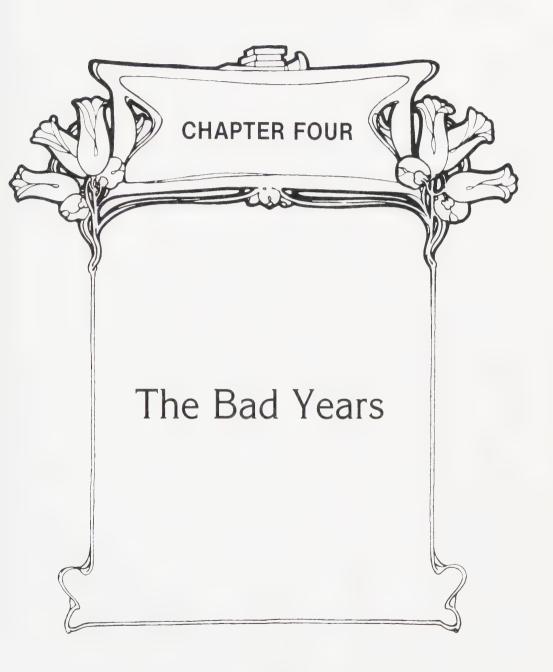
Other Habana suppliers were:

J. McCallum — McGowan's Selection, 200 acres, 34 acres under cane; three years.

\_\_. Hansen — 1,200 acres leased from Mr. Mackenzie Scott, 30 acres cane.

Vines Bros. — 50 acres leased from T. Davis, 40 acres cane expected for 1895.

- P. McKinley 180 acres freehold, 50 acres leased, 40 acres cane; 13 years.
- J. Power "Greenvale" 1,662 acres leased from Richard Neill, 60 acres cane.
- J. Birditt "Wolston", 103 acres leased from E. Denman, 60 acres cane; three years.



#### Part twenty-seven

## THE BIG MILL

Economic fortune at Mackay last century fluctuated in 10 year cycles — high in 1871-73, low in 1875-77, high in 1881-83, in the depths by 1888-89, high again in 1893-95 and down once more by 1900.

The "Polynesian" Extension Bill of 1892 lifted business confidence; on 4th October the *Standard* hailed "the dawn of prosperity for this district". The *Mercury* observed on 2nd January 1894: "So brisk has been business in country lands that town businesses have been almost entirely neglected". (Each paper was conducted in tandem with real estate enterprises.) This briskness, borne of the optimism generated in part by the "Kanaka Bill" and in part by the Government's intention to back new central mills, was further enlivened by a new philosophy in milling.

E.M. Long told the 1893 Mackay Agricultural Conference: "To make a factory pay there must be unlimited cane to deal with, such large quantities to put through, that an infinitesimal profit on each ton of cane treated may aggregate into a fair profit in the capital invested in a factory".

Bolton's Ashburton decision led him to revise expansion plans current when he negotiated with The Leap growers. Instead of a 5 ft. or 5 ft. 6 in. mill, he ordered an A and W Smith 6 ft. mill from Glasgow. This became Farleigh's No. 1 mill; the 6 ft. Ashburton unit became No. 2 and the old Farleigh 5 ft. 6 in. unit No. 3. The new mill had 34 in. diameter rollers and 15 in. shafts.<sup>1</sup>

To Bolton's figure of £140,000 "new expenditure" (probably since Lawes acquired the estates) must now be added £24,000 for the Ashburton plant. The Ashburton purchase price was believed to be £70,000 for mill and estate but that figure was also quoted as the cost to Farleigh of the "Ashburton transfer".

Given that £140,000 of new expenditure had been made and that George Smith in 1890 had valued Farleigh-Foulden at £150,000, a massive increase in cane supply was needed. Farleigh's output, ranging between 1,500 and 2,500 tons, did not compare well with some of its neighbours — North Eton 4,000, Habana 3,000 and Homebush a massive 7,000 tons a year.

Bolton pushed ahead with his tramway system — fewer than four miles had been built between 1888 and 1891, 12 by 1894 and 15 by 1896, with more planned.<sup>2</sup>

J.T. O'Riordan recollected the tramway system over 40 years: "Mr. Bolton's position at Farleigh gave him the widest authority. He could run the mill as he pleased. When he recommended a tramline, the Lawes works in London started to build the noted all-iron Farleigh cane trucks. Two seven ton locos were built by Dick Kerr of Kilmarnock. The manager and his engineer became proficient loco drivers".

It is appropriate here to interpolate other later details of Farleigh's rolling stock. Following importation of Lawes' steel trucks, a wooden truck made locally was used. This was larger than the original. George Wright has recalled that prior to World War I it could be made locally for £36. An early feature of these was an iron buffer —

probably a copy of the type used on the early Lawes trucks. These were replaced by a wooden buffer — half moon shaped with a semicircle of iron around the curve and an iron plate top and bottom. Both plates and the wooden core were drilled to take a draw pin. The early Farleigh draw pins seem to have set a pattern which made Farleigh rolling stock different to that used by other mills in the district.

A distinctive Farleigh truck was dubbed the "dreadnought". It had a comfortable load capacity of 3½ tons. It came into general use in the 1920's and survived until the early 1960's when a few of the mill's earliest chopped cane bins were fitted. Originally coil sprung, the truck later had the springs removed and pipe ferrules were fitted.

Bearings had to be oiled each time a full rake arrived at the mill carrier.

Two parallel 7/8 in. steel bars ran through the middle of the chassis and connected to the outside of the buffers. The distinctive Farleigh link pin was retained. It had a certain advantage over other types, as once a rake of empties was hooked up the hitching needed no more attention. On the ring and hook method used elsewhere, a rake travelled out hooked singly but had to be double hooked after the trucks were loaded.

J.T. O'Riordan says: "John McReith was the first (or one of the first) of the regular drivers and was there for many years. These locos were in service until Farleigh handled Homebush cane (in 1923) when one was used at Rosella siding. Two Avondale 10 tonners and then two 12 ton Fowlers were bought and after 1930 a 15 ton and a 17 ton Fowler. Mick O'Riordan drove all of these".

George Wright adds the names of four more well remembered drivers of the Mick O'Riordan period — Harry Bode, Bob Gibson, Roy Anderson and Sid Vidgers.

In 1893 Bolton installed electric light and telephones. He used the Ganz (Budapest) system of 110 volts and 30 amps. A large arc light lit the carrier in preparation for three-shift crushing. Phones were put in at Farleigh House, the main office and the bullock teams terminus at Foulden. (Sugar went by tramway to this terminus, whence teams took it to the river wharves in town.) The phone system, by Ericson of Stockholm, was installed by a Mr. Harcourt of Ganz and Co., Melbourne, for whom Black and Crompton were Mackay agents.<sup>4</sup>

Cane supplies for continuous shifts were critically important. Ashburton's crop covered 1,500 acres but with declining land productivity 15 tons per acre was the best yield that could be expected.

The potential of the independent supplier finally had received full recognition at Farleigh with the agreement with The Leap growers. Now in 1894 A.H. Lloyd was cutting up Dumbleton and in July Bolton announced a tramline into the subdivisions, offering 13/- a ton on the line — slightly better than The Leap had accepted 18 months before. By 1894 he had 10 small blocks of his own land leased to farmers, mostly for 5½ years. This gave him 16 regular independent suppliers and he hoped to increase the number to 70 or 80.5

Edward Denman was not over-impressed with these efforts. He harked back to alleged stifling of local investors by the repudiation of Miclere district agreements in the mid 1880's. The incident was referred to during the 1889 Royal Commission by W.T. Paget of Nindaroo. Paget said he had heard of only one instance of agreements between growers and a mill owner being repudiated. "That was at Farleigh where the manager had exceeded his powers and given too long a term".

The Ashburton purchase price of £24,000 seems to have been a bargain. It reflected

at once the over sanguine expectations of the district's earlier planters and the economic rigours of the nineties.<sup>6</sup>

It was certainly tragically low compared to the £150,000 put on Pioneer-Ashburton by George Smith in 1890 or the £200,000 McKinnon and Co. and the Bank of Australasia had outlaid on those estates.<sup>7</sup>

The cost of equipping the new Pleystowe Central Mill was being quoted as between £30,000 and £35,000 and since the Ashburton transaction included a large part of the estate lands. Frederick Bolton probably had made a good deal, even at a total cost of £70,000. In the early stages of the Ashburton transfer, Farleigh's results seem to have been relatively satisfactory. Working a single shift in 1893 the season's output was 1,500 tons; 2,500 was expected from planned three shift days in 1894. The final figure for 1894 was 3,000 tons with milling help from Ashburton.8

(For comparison, other district figures were: Eton Central 3,450, Racecourse 3,300, Homebush 9,000, Palms and Te Kowai 3,200, Palmyra 700, Meadowlands 1,400, Nindaroo 1,300 and Habana 3,100,)°

The mill transfer fell behind schedule. Possibly A.D. Cartner's death in 1894 had something to do with it. Nevertheless the results of the 1894 season were heartening. Fresh efforts encouraged by the "Polynesian" Extension Bill seemed to be paying off. Extra boiler power was added but in March it was decided to stand over final combination of the two factories until 1895. Farleigh could not handle the 1894 crop on its own and Ashburton was started up in early October. All crushing operations finished in late December and an immediate start was planned on the transfer. The new Smith mill was expected in March 1895. 10

In February 1895 work was being "pressed on with", not without troubles.11

J.T. O'Riordan had a fine memory for dramatic occasions: "A multitubular boiler weighing 13 tons, aboard a two ton wagon hired from the Cameron's Foundry, became hopelessly bogged for two days at the cemetery. Patrick Dunworth, overseer at Farleigh for many years, talked two Homebush bullockies into taking over the job. Crossing the river the 18 ft. wide Hospital Bridge swayed ominously under the load". As had been demonstrated with the Ashburton plant a decade earlier, the wet season was the worst time of the year to transport heavy machinery over Mackay's roads. 12

Farleigh Mill 1895, when the Ashburton transfer was in process. Photo: John Oxley Library,



The "big mill" was not ready in 1895 but Farleigh comfortably handled the whole crop. It was a bad year everywhere. Even with the extra output of the new Central Mills at Marian and Pleystowe, district output fell from 28,600 tons (in 1894) to 23,000. Production from most of the older mills was down by almost a third; Farleigh made only 1,600 tons.<sup>13</sup>

The figure seems unbelievably low for the combined plantations but the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co. was not faring much better. Te Kowai, like Ashburton, had made a small final run in 1894 and only Palms was left. Palms produced 2,200 tons in 1895.

The new work dragged on into the winter of 1896. Unseasonal rains in the growing period followed by an extremely cold winter made crop expectations poor. Finally the transfer was complete. The result looked impressive but crushing did not get into full swing until September. However the new plant performed well and despite the late start and although Farleigh was the last mill to finish, the whole crop was treated. But the final sugar make barely reached 1,500 tons. This from a mill which theoretically had a capacity similar to that of Homebush.

The mill's two locos were now hauling cane on four main line extensions — from Foulden to the south, from Coningsby and The Leap to the North-west, the Ashburton connection from the west and south-west and a run tapping "the Scrubs" to the east.

Of the North Side lands, Farleigh scrubs most resembled the lush tropical rain forest most people associate with the North. Vines, ferns, palms and soft leafed ground cover proliferated amongst the typical North Side hard leafed vegetation. As late as the 1950's the Farleigh–Mackay road, which ran through the edge of the area, passed for several chains under a closed leafy archway.

Prior to the construction of the line which tapped the Inverness area and which in extended form is now known as the Richmond line, hauling cane wagons across the heavy gluepot to the east of the Norbrook hills had its hazards. At one spot in later years, ploughmen turned up hundreds of horse shoes shed as horses had struggled through a gluepot basin during wet harvest periods over a number of years. From the relics it was evident a blacksmith had set up an anvil and forge at the bog so that the horses could be reshod before continuing the long haul to the mill.

A.J. Noonan (Farleigh deputy chairman in 1982) identified the spot on his Glenella property "at the foot of a knob near Jane Creek where the gluepot meets the creek flat silt". The cane was hauled to the high country over a series of contoured terraces on the seaward slopes of the Norbrook hills, then across Jane Creek and up to the mill.

As will be seen Bolton had massive worries from poor prices, pests and bad seasons but he had every reason to be confident of his factory and the tramway system he was developing to feed it.

The new cane carrier was 90 ft. long and wide enough to serve the 6 ft. mill in No. 1 position. This was heavier than the Ashburton 6 ft. unit at No. 2, with 15 inch cast steel shafts and bearings 17 inches long. Cheek plates were "massive" and cups fixed by four holding down bolts of special strength. Its beam engine had 24 inch cylinders with a 48 inch stroke. The flywheel was 18 ft. in diameter.

The Ashburton unit, also from A. and W. Smith was lighter than the new one and was set back at 50 ft. centres from No. 1, with a steam equipped macerating bath 20 ft. long between. The third crusher, a 5 ft. 6 in. Mirlees and Watson, was set back at

further 40 ft. centres from No. 2. Beam engines also drove Nos. 2 and 3. A broad raised engineers' platform ran the length of the crushing train. A megas elevator ran to six multitubular boilers 14 ft. by 8 ft. fitted with automatic megas feeding stoke holes. The old factory had four of these, of which two, or possibly three were discarded.

The "boiling house", 130 ft. by 80 ft. ran at right angles to the crushing train with an 80 ft. by 30 ft. annex on the western side. This contained 10 new clarifiers added to the old Farleigh plant; 22 subsiders ranged in capacity from 800 to 1,000 gallons each.

Juice was gravitated to a double set of triple effets with a total heating surface of 8,200 sq. ft. Seven filter presses, four of them "very large" were installed. On the floor of the "boiling house" three engines operated the evaporating equipment. Duplicate sets of dynamos and one engine, powered an extension of the original Ganz lighting system.

Two extensive ranges of Weston centrifugals were connected by screw conveyor to the sugar room. The latter was served by an internal tramline with the floor of the tram trucks on the same level as the sugar room floor for easy loading. The sugar room at 150 ft. by 50 ft. was, relatively, very large allowing for adequate storage space if prices were not right at time of manufacture. The "boiling house" and sugar room were lit and ventilated by "immense skylights of ground glass".

The old Foulden vacuum pan had been restored to use and added to the two provided from Farleigh and Ashburton. Two triple effets with a heating surface of 8,000 sq. ft. handled the evaporation. (Homebush in 1894 had two triple effets and an intermediate pot, which virtually gave one triple and one quadruple, with a heating surface of 9,000 sq. ft.).<sup>14</sup>

Even before the transfer the mill locality had the aspect of a small township. In 1894 Aneas Munro wrote: "Situated round a large and substantial mill house are all the usual stores and other buildings found on estates, including the manager's residence, mechanics', overseers', engineers', sugar boilers' and men's quarters — butchers' and bakers' shops from which all meat and bread used on the consolidated estates is turned off"."

Maintenance of beef and dairy herds, horse teams and the cultivation of maize, potatoes and general produce for consumption on the estate by both man and beast, constituted a large segment of a plantation's industrial effort; and in these areas of activity in the nineties, pests and poor seasons took a heavy ancillary toll.

In 1893 Ashburton had employed 250 Islanders. In 1894 the workforce at Farleigh comprised 125 whites, 240 Islanders, 140 Japanese, 10 Malays and about 40 Chinese. (The Chinese were working on contract and were used extensively as earthworks gangs in tramway extensions.)<sup>16</sup>

In 1896 the force was smaller, due in part to some rationalisation, the fact that a large proportion of the crop was coming from independent growers, and a reflection of the tough times of the mid-nineties. The combined estates then employed only 70 whites and 300 coloured employees.<sup>17</sup>

Islander accommodation was adequate, though not up to the standard supplied by Long at Habana. The labour force at Farleigh was given a high degree of autonomy and some of the buildings, though not masterpieces of architecture, had been built with great pride by the Islanders themselves, keen to "have a go", with white man's tools and techniques. Sketches of married "boys" quarters show them as thatched

buildings with gable-type roofs and eaves which came down almost to head level. There was also a mission house and a "Kanaka church".

As already noted, Farleigh had always been a long way from water but with careful husbandry the supply through the original Foulden pipeline had been adequate. More water was now required and several dams were planned on Fursden Creek, the largest to hold 2,000,000 gallons. Further relief was planned by building additional towers for cooling and recycling. A pond holding 500,000 gallons was built at the mill.

It was not until 1966 that a new major water source was finally tapped. A 9 in. fibro pipeline was laid from Dumbleton Rocks to carry river water; 3.7 miles along the north bank to the existing pumping site at Foulden, thence along J.J. Cohen's original pipeline route to the mill.

In spite of poor crop prospects for 1896, district enthusiasm ran high. The *Mercury* and the *Standard* enthused at the business impetus given by the "Central Mill experiment".

T.D. Chataway wrote: "We think we may claim that those in the sugar industry have not neglected to do what was expected of them when the importation of Polynesians was again permitted by the people of Queensland. They were expected to develop the Central Mill system and so reform the industry that in time it might be able to do without any special form of labour at all"."

Lawes and Bolton deserve a share of the praise. Though late in the field of estate subdivision and though persevering with the old plantation system when the central mill system had demonstrable advantages, they had taken enormous risks and had substantial capital losses to recover. History reveals flaws in their mode of operation but it must accord them full credit for big thinking and bold action.

The "big mill" was now an observable fact but it needed cane. Outside supplies now came from 35 growers — about half of them lessees of estate lands. The number of lease applications indicated this source of supply would increase substantially. Their cane was badly needed.<sup>19</sup>

A familiar figure on the Farleigh early morning landscape in those years was a young Englishman, T.W. Peele, Farleigh Estate secretary. Peele comes into the story 30 years later, when negotiations were in hand to transfer Homebush cane supplies from Farleigh to Racecourse and North Eton. Peele was manager of the latter. In the early years of the new century he was involved in the development of the local dairy industry and this brought him into a spirited clash of opinion with E.M. Long.

Farleigh identities remembered Peele well for his early morning hunting jaunts and the fine game dogs he kept. Often on an early winter's morning, with the sun still low over the Norbrook-Dulverton hills he would emerge from the ground fog along Jane Creek, dressed in traditional English countryman's shooting garb, his gun slung across his back, a brace of ducks in one hand and one or two dogs under tight discipline behind.

<sup>1.</sup> J.T. O'Riordan Pioneer article D.M. 5-12-1931: T.S.F.M. p 35.

<sup>2.</sup> T.S.F.M. p 30; Q.S.I. p 83.

<sup>3.</sup> J.T. O'Riordan Pioneer article D.M. 5-12-1931.

<sup>4.</sup> M.M. 11-9-1893.

<sup>5.</sup> T.S.F.M. p 29.

<sup>6.</sup> M.M. 2-1-1984.

- 7. Q.S.I. p 85.
- 8. T.S.F.M. p 29.
- These tonnages seem to have been compiled from different sources and occasionally variations occur in published lists.
- 10. This progress was reported during 1894 S.J.T.C.
- 11. S.J.T.C. Vol 5 p 9.
- 12. J.T. O'Riordan Pioneer recollections D.M. 9-1-1932.
- 13. S.J.T.C. Vol 4 p 286. Approximate district figures for 1895 were: Homebush 6,500, Habana 2,200, Farleigh 1,600, Racecourse 2,230, North Eton 2,100, Marian 2,100, Palms 2,200, Meadowlands 1,200, Pleystowe 700, Palmyra 450.
- 14. T.S.F.M. pp 30, 33; M.S. 19-8-1895.
- 15. T.S.F.M. p 30.
- 16. M.M. 7-3-1893.
- 17. Details from various Press references and Q.S.I. p 83.
- 18. S.J.T.C. Vol 5 p 1.
- 19. District totals taken out when Farleigh still had a few days' crushing to go (final for the others) were: Farleigh 1,421, Habana 1,746, Homebush 4,027, Marian 1,816, Meadowlands 729, Nindaroo 751, North Eton 1,037, Palmyra 180, Palms 1,483, Pleystowe 1,083, Plane Creek 400, Racecourse 1,678; S.J.T.C., Vol 5 Dec. 1896.

### Part twenty-eight

# **CLOSURE**

Cane supplies to the new mill continued to be insufficient for a healthy aggregate of E.M. Long's "infinitesimally small profit" per ton from a large throughput of tons.

Declining soil productivity contributed to, but was only part of the problem, for there was ample virgin soil to switch to. More than 300 acres had to be left to long fallow because subsoil had worked up into the thin topsoil cover. The effect was the same as growing cane on similar country today without fertilising.

The combined estates had originally covered 8,220 acres. Of these 3,200 acres were under the plough and a further 600 were cultivated by hand on the hill scrubs. By 1897 the total had increased to 9,000 acres and the total lands (not all cultivated) of the independent farmers came to at least another 2,000 acres.<sup>1</sup>

Cane grubs caused serious damage. Too many crops with grub damaged root systems "cut out light" and never produced rations. The pest first appeared as a threat on the North Side in 1893. A long dry summer in 1895 followed by prolonged

rainy periods and a biting winter in 1896 made crop prospects bad enough. Grubs aggravated the situation.

On the North Side, Long, Paget and Bolton agreed to help their farmers with control measures. The methods were labour intensive and made only a small fraction of the impact which was achieved after the 1930's by chemical control. Various innovations were tried but generally beetles were attracted by bright lights at night or shaken out from trees, gathered, taken to reception points, weighed and burned. Grubs were gathered by men following ploughs. These methods survived until the 1940's. They provided a welcome supplementary income for hard pressed rural families and a ready source of pocket money for energetic children.

The year 1896 was poor from almost any standpoint. Most cane growers relied heavily on returns from beef and dairy cattle and in this year an encroaching epidemic of ticks and redwater which had been steadily spreading south from the Gulf and northern cattle districts since 1892, reached outlying Mackay properties.

The *Mercury* rated 1895 as the district's worst year since 1888. It was in fact the only really bad year, in a seasonal sense, since 1888. The Government Valuer, working under the Sugar Works Guarantee Act of 1893 told the *Brisbane Courier* a worse time could not have been chosen for the two new Mackay Central Mills to start. (These were Marian and Pleystowe. Plane Creek began with a small tonnage in 1896 after a start plagued with mechanical trouble. Both Marian and Pleystowe, in 1895 however, had been able to meet their interest commitments.)<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the rigours of the weather, cane lands continued in good demand and industry leaders urged the steadily increasing ranks of independent farmers to increase production so that by working at full capacity, mills would be able to pay the best price for cane.

Bolton sought new suppliers. In 1896 he arranged to take cane from Constant Creek growers with an understanding to extend a tramline "to Reliance Creek second crossing in the first year and to Hill's farm in the second".

The *Mercury* rated 1897 as another "unfortunate year" with cool weather and poor rain in the growing season and a drop in price. Average costs of production at the 12 Mackay mills were calculated at £8 a ton. This was the base price the C.S.R. Company paid for 1897 production, plus a bonus of 17/– a ton; that is, the bonus was the district's milling profit, £18,870 on a total output of 22,000 tons.<sup>3</sup>

No specific Farleigh figures are available for this period, except that the "big mill" made 2,300 tons of sugar out of its potential for 7,000, in 1897. Figures from other mills give a good indication of the state of Lawes' bold new endeavours to survive. Published results of the Central Mills in those years indicate that seasonal returns did not vary greatly from mill to mill if due weight is given to local distortions of the general pattern. Pleystowe that year made 2,100 tons and returned 10 per cent on its capital of £30,000. (This was better than the district average.)

Farleigh's capital was £100,000, a greatly written down figure which will be discussed later. Even if Farleigh had performed as well as Pleystowe (and this would have been unlikely, since Pleystowe was a new mill) its return on even its reduced capital could hardly have exceeded three per cent. Pleystowe, of course, had to buy its cane but Farleigh had a very large plantation complex to maintain.

Lawes was wealthy enough not to require a dividend urgently. If he had, and with

Bolton still improving the tramway system and mill plant, the Estate's liquid position

could not have been good.

Meanwhile at home Sir John's personal affairs were changing. Bolton left W.H. Hyne in charge at Farleigh in late 1896 and went to England. On 5th April 1897 it was announced at Mackay that the Farleigh Sugar Estate had been registered as a limited company in London.<sup>5</sup>

Company membership was:

J.B. Lawes Bt., Rothamsted, St. Albans.

C.B. Lawes, Chelsea Gardens S.W.

Miss E. Creyke, 3 Seymour Place, Mayfair W.

Miss D. Creyke, 3 Seymour Place, Mayfair W.

E.H.T. Hodgson, Harpenden, Herts.

T. Bennett, 21 Mincing Lane E.C.

F.W.D. Bolton, 21 Mincing Lane E.C.

G.F. Berry, Atlas Chemical Works, Milwall

Sir J.B. Lawes was named a director and Bolton was appointed Managing Director in Queensland

Lawes issued a circular dated 8th February 1897, which read: ". . . . . I have this day registered my business as a limited liability company and . . . . . for the future it will be carried on in the style of The Farleigh Sugar Plantation Co. Ltd. The change is entirely a matter of form but owing to my advancing age and the fact that at the present time no member of my family is competent to take my place, I felt it incumbent on me to take this step in order that in the event of my death the business may be carried on without interruption.

"The capital, none of which is offered for public subscription, has been fixed at £100,000 in £10 shares. Mr. F.W. Bolton, who has had the care of the plantation during the last 13 years, will, as managing director, continue to give the business his best attention. . . . . . (he) will shortly return to Farleigh." The two major components of the consolidated estates, Farleigh-Foulden and Pioneer-Ashburton, had been valued by George Smith at £300,000 in 1890. Much had been written off the books and stricken from the value of the North Side sugar estates in seven years.

No record of Sir John Lawes' thoughts on his Farleigh investment at this time, appears to have survived but the sugar investment picture at Mackay certainly held dark patches for any capitalist as it came, also, to hold for the bureaucrats overseeing the progress of the Central Mills. The still birth of several ambitious local enterprises planned by George Smith in which he had hoped to involve the financial muscle of McIlwraith McEachern and several large Australian commercial houses would not have gone unremarked.

The story of The Hollow was similar. In 1884 Charles Rawson secured English backing for The North Queensland Sugar Estates Co. Ltd., based on subdivision of The Hollow lands. Applications were invited for leases to supply "Central Mills" (note the plural).

The conditions were generous — minimum tenure seven years with no rent asked inside two years, after that 20 shillings per acre a year, but only for land cultivated. The newly constructed Mackay-Mirani railway ran through the area and would soon be opened. The venture failed and during the Royal Commission of 1889 this exchange took place:<sup>7</sup>

Question: Why is the Company in its present position?

E.S. Rawson: Inability to start work in consequence of the want of labour. The applicants we had for the land desired us to guarantee labour for the term of the leases, which we could not do. . . . . . . 11,500 acres had been available to service the mill.

Later he added: "The company is in liquidation and the estate is to be sold if possible. The people at home are tired of waiting. I've no doubt if there were any permanency of labour or any prospect of making a living by cultivating cane we might go on".

It was not long after this that Lawes had ordered Bolton to close Farleigh if the labour position did not improve. Sir John was closer to the scene of other sugar problems than was his Queensland manager.

"A large crop in Europe in 1891–92 and a large Cuban crop depressed the market and had it not been for rapidly increasing consumption, prices would have fallen lower than they did."

Eighteen months later: "Australia is looking for markets. There are only two for Queensland — Hong Kong and Vancouver. Hong Kong is close to Java and the Philippines. The Vancouver market is very small. The Sandwich Islands, (in any case) can supply the (American) Pacific slope".

By February 1895 world prices were at their lowest and supplies at their greatest volume ever.<sup>10</sup>

Locally the philosophy of profit through volume persisted. The surplus was not the problem, the argument ran. Profit came for sales. The lower the unit of profit the greater the number of unit sales needed. It was the farmer's job to produce. It was the miller's job to sell. It was a philosophy of optimism, of the kind which invariably keeps rural production pushing ahead, but there were limits. Finally in the late 1920's the process had to be reined in by comprehensive and permanent controls, when it became obvious Queensland's production potential could not be underpinned by guaranteed markets and prices.

Local prices became ever more drastically influenced by European bounty policies as the *Sugar Journal and Tropical Cultivator* of March 1898 explained: "European producers obtained a bounty in 1887, indirectly, by a complicated manipulation of inland excise dues and drawbacks on exports. In 1887 beet sugar had accounted for 49 per cent of the world sugar production. In 1888 the system was generally changed to manufacturing in bond, when a direct and perfectly undisguised bounty was substituted".

Beet sugar made steady inroads into the other 51 per cent of the market and as European output increased so too it seemed, did the political weight of its producers. German farmers set the pace but so upset the balance of the world sugar trade that they drew a backlash. They had been getting a bounty of 7/6 a ton with expectations that bounties were to cease in 1897. However they had knocked the bottom out of the world markets and so depressed prices that with two years of the arrangement to run they were asking three times the bounty.<sup>11</sup>

German sugar legislation spread international alarm. In May 1896 the Reichstag increased bounties. Then so did Austria, France and the U.S.A. and the price of German sugar steadily fell. Australian sugar was priced off the English market. A

demand existed for cane sugar but only beet sugar could be bought. Even cheap Java sugar could not compete with the bounties.<sup>12</sup>

Already run down, the British West Indies industry was now almost mortally stricken. The British Government set up a Royal Commission and Queensland producers hoped some stabilising action would result. Three Queenslanders, Frederick Bolton, Henry Brandon and one of the Neame brothers from Macknade gave evidence.

It seemed not unreasonable to expect some kind of Imperial preference and international action, but the result was disappointing. The Commission's finding largely dodged the bounty problem and confined effective attention to immediate West Indies domestic problems. It virtually ignored the fact that no matter what was done to cut costs, cheaper sugar elsewhere tended to promote higher beet bounties.

Bolton's review of events when he returned to Australia were widely reported. His reports made a direct impact on local people. They demonstrated how decisions made across the world could affect their welfare as vitally as any disagreement local planters had had with the British Colonial Office only a few years before.

An Anti-Bounty league was formed in London in late 1897 or early 1898. 13

Almost immediately Australian bodies representing "all classes" gathered funds. In London, Henry Brandon was active. At Mackay, a local Anti-Bounty League council was formed with W.T. Paget as Chairman and Samuel Lambert, treasurer. 14

Other problems developed locally. Cane prices were at the root of some of them. Growers argued that if the bounty problem was eased, millers could pay more for cane. E.M. Long, for one, disagreed, claiming the local price question should be dealt with on an entirely different basis. His view was finally to prevail but not in his lifetime and the question of the division of sugar monies between grower and mill had two decades of intensifying argument ahead of it.

In a manner which was already becoming traditional, ranks were closed in face of a common enemy and on a local Anti-Bounty executive E.M. Long and J.E. Davidson represented the millers, Samuel Lambert town and country business and C.P. Mau the growers.

The plantation mills contributed one shilling per 100 tons of sugar made and one farthing per ton on cane grown. Voluntary donations were made by growers at the same rate and contributions collected from business houses. By June 1898 £100 had been sent to London and about £80 was held locally. Soon afterwards in London, the Neame brothers of Macknade and Messrs. Young and Howes of Bundaberg asked Henry Brandon to represent Queensland on the parent body. The Queensland sugar industry never allowed distance to breed insularity.

Times were toughening. Cyclone Eline struck in February 1898. Farleigh's main mill building was partly unroofed, Farleigh House badly damaged and roofs blown from outbuildings. That year the 12 Mackay mills and the newly opened Proserpine Central lifted output by almost half to 33,000 tons and this maintained commercial activity. But the average cost of production increased from £8 to £8/7/6d. a ton and the C.S.R. bonus fell from 17 to 12 shillings. The total district milling profit, with Proserpine included, did not reach £18,000. Farleigh, with its potential to make 7,000 tons, turned out 2,500 tons of sugar. As a result the 1899 slack season works program was virtually a holding operation.<sup>15</sup>

Worse was to come. The wet season in 1899 did little for the crop. This was the start

of a drought which was not to break until the summer rains of 1903. District sugar production was almost halved to 18,600 tons in 1899. At Farleigh it fell by more than half to 1,200 tons. The grub plague had passed but that was small consolation.

The new century arrived in the middle of a scorching summer, with crop prospects poor even if a normal "wet" arrived. It didn't. This seems to have been the last straw for Bolton for in May 1900 he confirmed publicly that he had decided to close "having completed all contracts with the neighbouring farmers". Since the contracts had been allowed to run out without renewal, it seems the closure had been a probability for some time. 16

Sir John Lawes died in July and with the financial mainspring gone there seemed no chance of a change of mind. The mill made 1,000 tons that season, at the end of which the *Sugar Journal and* Tropical Cultivator confirmed: "The Estates with their gigantic mill has closed so far as the ownership of the late Sir John Lawes is concerned. The family company . . . . . now intends to let the whole concern rest, or sell if possible". Bolton nevertheless in 1901 processed the residue of his ratoons and took cane from some of his old suppliers while they decided on their future plans; 950 tons of sugar were made and that was the end. The losses the Lawes interests had sustained at Farleigh have been reliably stated as not less than £200,000. Bolton's final task was to see how much of it he could salvage.<sup>17</sup>

Nindaroo had crushed for the last time in 1900 and Habana survived another year to 1902 before closing. Balnagowan and Nebia lands continued to supply Pleystowe and Palms and most of the balance of the greatly reduced North Side crop went across the river to Racecourse and Pleystowe. From Balnagowan to the sea, lantana moved in on the old plantation lands.

It is appropriate here to tell the stories of the two North Side plantations not so far related in detail and whose closure, with that of Farleigh, consolidated the depression which settled over the North Side.

<sup>1.</sup> T.S.F.M. p 29.

<sup>2.</sup> M.M. 22-10-1895.

<sup>3.</sup> M.M. 4-1-1898.

<sup>4.</sup> M.M. 21-12-1897.

<sup>5.</sup> M.M. 5-4-1897.

<sup>6.</sup> M.M. 7-2-1885.

<sup>7.</sup> Transcript courtesy A.S.P.A.

<sup>8.</sup> Louisiana Planter cutting, also quoted M.S. 5-7-1893.

<sup>9.</sup> M.M. 28-2-1894.

<sup>10.</sup> M.M. 18-2-1895.

<sup>11.</sup> M.M. 30-4-1895.

<sup>12.</sup> M.M. 24-11-1896.

<sup>13.</sup> S.J.T.C. February and March 1898.

<sup>14.</sup> M.M. 19-11-1898.

<sup>15.</sup> S.J.T.C. May 1899.

<sup>16.</sup> S.J.T.C. May 1900.

<sup>17.</sup> A.S.J. July 1913 p 251; 1901 season's crushing figures D.M. 4-1-1902. See Appendix E.

#### Part twenty-nine

# **NINDAROO**

Walter Trueman Paget was the principal partner, with his elder brother Arthur William, in Nindaroo plantation. Three Paget brothers took up land which later became Nindaroo. The earliest selection was made by the eldest, John Gray Paget, who was drowned in the Pioneer River at Devils Elbow in 1876. They were the sons of Arthur Paget of Hazley, Worcester, England. John is believed to have arrived in Mackay in 1871. Walter the youngest arrived in Mackay in 1872, aged 18 years; Arthur, two years older, is believed to have arrived in 1874.

W.T. Paget was a modest, diligent, honest, deceptively gentle, determined man. He was a teetotaller and a pillar of the Mackay Anglican community. All these facets of the character of the man were duplicated in the character of Paget the politician. It must surely be a reflection on the nature of politics and no reflection at all on Paget, that these characteristics distinguished him as having been a little odd as a politician — a little colourless, a little diffident, restricted in his range of interests and experience. Yet he was a member of Parliament for 14 years and a cabinet minister for seven, during which period a greater length of railway construction was carried out by his department than at any other like period in Queensland history.

He regarded himself as a farmer rather than a planter and seemed to harbour a sense of inferiority for the fact, that while some of his contemporaries had sugar and agricultural experience overseas and elsewhere in Australia, his own had been confined to Mackay.

Nevertheless he made a fair fist of it. He told the Queensland Parliament in 1913: "I got my first initiation 41 years ago. I went direct into (the sugar industry) when I came to this country. I was intimately connected as a sugar grower for a mill, as a sugar grower for my own firm's mill, as a purchaser of farmers' cane and as a miller. Although I do not claim to have had the same experience as some honourable members I do claim to have some knowledge of the industry".<sup>2</sup>

If reports and old timers' beliefs that sugar was planted at Nindaroo in 1871 are correct, the early crops probably went to The Cedars or Inverness. Aneas Munro says the first Nindaroo cane was planted that year.<sup>3</sup>

The brothers grew vegetables in commercial quantities, potatoes and corn, tried tobacco in the early seventies and had a good sized domestic dairy herd and a small mob of beef cattle. They found a good source of revenue from timber — mainly cedar — growing in the Nindaroo scrubs. They were "gentlemen farmers" — J.G. Paget was an accountant — but in an era when planters did not do much manual work, they worked as hard as many a homesteader. They prospered modestly from their mixed enterprise in the 1870's. The tragic concentration of their assets after John's drowning at least made it a little easier to arrange the capital to build their mill in 1883.

It was a solid and reliable early eighties "big mill", with a single set of 5 ft. 6 in. rollers and housed in a single main building. By 1894 this covered 220 ft. by 132 ft. A

small group of cottages housed the key staff. Islander quarters were average. Walter Paget was regarded as a compassionate employer. The mill opened on 18th August 1883 — the same day as W.S.C. Adrian's construction accident at Mt. Pleasant. They expected 700 tons of sugar from the first crop, which was to come partly from neighbours.<sup>5</sup>

The Pagets were not first in the field with installation of double crushers but they were in the main stream of district development when they put in a 5 ft. 6 in. No. 2 mill in 1887. That year Meadowlands, River Estate, Palms and Te Kowai also duplicated.<sup>6</sup>

By 1889 the estate, comprising 1,410 acres freehold, had 700 acres under cane, 45 under maize, 23 under sweet potatoes and two under sorghum; 549 acres in 1888 produced 310 tons of sugar. This was relatively better than the disastrous production on many other plantations during the 1888 drought and reflected the large proportion of hill scrub which supplied the Nindaroo crop. Black Tanna was a staple variety on the hillsides. In 1889 investment in the estate totalled £65,000, with machinery and buildings set at £24,000.7

Nindaroo developed a reputation for making good quality "yellow" sugars, which the *Mercury* on 7th March 1893 said "are known all over the commercial world". Nindaroo's well known chief engineer, Andrew Gibson, always maintained that Nindaroo was the only mill in Queensland to make good "Demerara crystals".

A *Mercury* comment of 6th September 1892 gives an indication of the significance of different types of sugars in a year's district operations: "Last year Nindaroo and North Eton were the only mills in the district making yellows. This season North Eton is making raw sugar but Farleigh, Te Kowai and Nindaroo will make up to last year's supply of yellows. Te Kowai intended to crush for seven weeks making yellows and then the remaining cane would be crushed at Palms".

About this time, the C.S.R. Company was sounding out local millers on suggestions the Company acquire the whole, or the bulk of the district crop. When this came about a few seasons later, it stabilised local prices and was an inducement to millers to concentrate on making good quality 88 net titre raws. (E.M. Long of Habana has been credited with triggering the rise of the basic quality standard from 88 to 94 net titre, which applies today.)

The C.S.R. move accentuated development of new elements of "sugar politics". Local farmers were then joining the P.R.F.A. in preference to the M.P.F.A. Questions of sugar price now became overlaid on the always simmering question of cane price. Charges of "monopolist" were laid against the C.S.R. Company and seemed substantiated in 1894 when Company chairman Edward Knox frankly told his shareholders that the purpose of the Company's takeover of the Melbourne based Australian Sugar Refining Company was to eliminate competition.<sup>8</sup>

A lexicon of emotive words and phrases developed about "just prices" and the role of the C.S.R. Company, which has clouded clear thinking, both inside and outside the industry, on sugar affairs ever since.

In 1893 Nindaroo had 600 acres under cane and expected to make 1,000 tons of sugar. By 1894 the mill was capable of producing 4,000 tons of sugar a year although like Farleigh it never achieved its potential. The two crushing units were helped by a shredder and what was regarded as an efficient maceration unit. "Back end" plant included triple effet heating surface of 5,000 sq. ft. and two six-ton vacuum pans. The

cuban water tower measured 40 ft. by 30 ft. and was 30 ft. high. It still had five tiers of brush filters through which 10,000 gallons of water an hour passed. Water went in at the top at a temperature of 125 degrees fahrenheit and cooled to 75 degrees fahrenheit collected in a 40,000 gallon receiving tank.

The plantation employed 55 whites and 160 Islanders. Classes were conducted nightly at a mission school and a "European minister of the Gospel", no doubt Anglican, preached every sixth week. Outside suppliers in 1894 were: from Richmond Trust Estate, Messrs. Dubois and Collett and A. Cumming; from The Cedars (on lease from Nindaroo), Collett, Cassels and O'Brien, Jane and Seaton; on lease from The Cedars, Messrs. Dubois and P. Keane. Edward Denman supplied Nindaroo from Etowrie (until he had a vigorous disagreement with Paget on cane price and went to Habana) and four growers leasing Etowrie lands also supplied Nindaroo: G.C. Underwood, Ah Foo, E.F.J. Graham and W. Jackson.

In 1894 the plantation had 160 acres of plant cane and 540 acres of ratoons for harvest in 1895 and expected to have a total area for harvest of 750 acres in 1896, still substantially short of manufacturing capacity for 4,000 tons of sugar, even allowing for supplies from outside. Most of the Nindaroo lands were on hill scrubs and special stone jumping implements were procured — and also developed or adapted on the plantation — for cultivation.<sup>9</sup>

Nindaroo's chief engineer, Andrew Gibson, a forthright Scot, was recommended to W.T. Paget by Hugh McCready. He had worked as a fitter early in his career. In 1917, when he was farmers' representative at Farleigh, he recalled that he had been associated with Nindaroo, Marian, Plane Creek, Pleystowe and Farleigh in positions which included manager, engineer and inspecting engineer. It is a measure of the respect he commanded that in years of serious miller-grower differences at Farleigh, an old "miller" should have been trusted as a growers' representative.

Gibson always retained a distinct Scottish brogue and all his life younger members of his family tended to be confused by habitual expressions of incomprehensible old country vernacular. Three of his sons became well known sugar industry personalities. Bill became a chemist at Marian; Jim was a chemist at Racecourse, then he became manager and finally chairman of directors.

He returns to the Farleigh story as Racecourse chairman (J.M. Gibson), in 1926 when Farleigh growers were settling in after having become owners of their own mill. The third son, Bob, was a loco driver at Farleigh for 20 years. He transferred to Racecourse for three years from 1926 and then spent 25 years at Mackay Power Station at Tennyson Street, and then Hume Street. His wife, a sprightly nonagenarian, has supplied many details and background information for this book. Andrew Gibson was for many years, secretary of the Mackay Branch of the United Cane Growers' Association, an active lieutenant for president T.A. Powell and a trusted regional officer for U.C.G.A. secretary W.H. Doherty.

Nindaroo developed a somewhat undeserved reputation for accidents. Only three major mishaps at the mill appear to have been recorded. An Islander (or Islanders) received injuries from contact with working machinery during the first season. Some time afterwards Thomas Robertson was killed by an explosion in the triple effet. The three "pots" of the effet were being cleaned and contained a mixture of molasses, water and dilute sulphuric acid, when the explosion occurred.

In November 1887, two Islanders, Tavee and Dowla, were killed in a boiler

explosion. W.T. Paget was not anxious to let the Press have details. This drew criticism from *Standard* editor H.B. Black, who said that up to that time Paget had been most accommodating when pressmen visited the estate. A subsequent enquiry indicated a fault in the boiler, but to begin with Paget was not sure where the fault lay.

Paget had several problems on his hands at the time. He had tried to introduce English (or European) migrants to plantation work. John Avery at Coningsby also had an intake of white workers. Most of them were unsatisfactory and did not stay. While the mill was stopped for repairs, one of Nindaroo's former suppliers had a "burnout". Paget provided 20 drays and the necessary labour to transfer the cane to another mill—either Habana or Richmond. Years afterwards Philip Kirwan, in print, recalled the explosion with liberal poetic licence, affirming that all the boilers blew up. Andrew Gibson then had an office in town. Wags had it that when he read the item he snorted more loudly than the original Nindaroo explosion. 10

The 1883 accident, the drama of the explosions, the dissatisfaction of the white migrants and one or two routine mishaps with either chutes or flying foxes getting cane down from high country tended to magnify, in local recollection, Nindaroo's accident record.

Nindaroo crushed its last crop in 1900. It was the first of the "big three" North Side mills to close. The closure seems to have been precipitate, determined by a quick decision by the Pagets' bank; not premeditated as in the case of Farleigh. Independent suppliers had not curtailed their 1900 plantings for the 1901 crop. Edward Denman later recalled that several of those suppliers had in fact made plantings for a crop in 1901 on which their own arrangements with Nindaroo's bank depended. E.M. Long ran a quick tramway link to tap Nindaroo cane but he is believed to have told potential suppliers in 1902 that there was no firm likelihood of his being able to crush their crop in 1903. F.W. Bolton made it quite clear 1901 would be his last year. Nindaroo produced 900 tons in its last year and no planting took place in 1901.

J.V. Chataway M.L.A., died on 12th April 1901. By 19th April both E.B. Swayne and W.T. Paget had declared their intention of contesting the seat. Swayne, one of the founders of the Pioneer River Farmers' Association, had helped raise the status of that body to one of a significant sugar industry organisation and as its secretary for eight years had earned a similar reputation for himself. Paget had already had an active career in local committee work. He had become a Harbour Board member in 1899. He had been a Pioneer Divisional Board member from 1883-90 and chairman for the last five of those years. (He became chairman again in 1901.) He was on the Bridges Board in 1900 and had been on the Hospitals Board.

The short election campaign which ensued reflects changes a decade had brought in local and State politics. In 1890 Griffith Liberals and McIlwraith-Moorehead Conservatives were the major political groupings. The *Mercury* supported the former, the *Standard* the latter. By 1900, the Labour movement's star was beginning to rise. Simon Tait contested the Chataway vacancy for the party on this occasion.

The *Mercury* supported Swayne in 1901 and the *Standard*, Paget. The *Standard* claimed the *Mercury* and Swayne tended to set country interests against town and said Paget would balance the respective interests. Finally Swayne did not nominate. Paget was not tagged to any party, the contest having been described in the Press as Ministerialists v Labour.

The Labour Party labelled Paget a nominee of the C.S.R. Company and also

claimed he was being promoted by the banks. This latter point seemed to infer that Paget received help from the financial institutions as a kind of quid pro quo for the precipitate closure of Nindaroo. Meetings were lively, the campaign was short and Paget won comfortably on 11th May 1901. Simon Tait was an earnest Labour pioneer whose integrity was beyond question. His cause suffered from the nonsense some of his supporters introduced into the campaign.

In 1908 Paget became Minister for Railways and Agriculture. He held the latter portfolio until 1911 but continued to hold Railways until he retired from Parliament in 1915. He retired to Mooloolaba, Queensland and died, aged 76, on 23rd December 1930. His brother Arthur died in June 1931.

<sup>1.</sup> D.M. 24-12-1930; 10-6-1931; undocumented reference D.M. Feb. 1925; *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament 1860-1929* by D.B. Waterson, T.S.F.M. pp 13-14. (Note: dates of arrival of John and Arthur Paget are not conclusively established).

<sup>2.</sup> D.M. 18-11-1913.

<sup>3.</sup> D.M. T.S.F.M. pp 13-14.

<sup>4.</sup> Walter, Arthur and W.H. Paxton were executors of John's estate.

<sup>5.</sup> M.M. recent issue after 8-8-1883.

<sup>6.</sup> M.M. 2-4-1887.

<sup>7.</sup> Evidence to 1889 Royal Commission.

<sup>8.</sup> S.P.E. p 45. The take-over was often mentioned afterwards by speakers who did not know who had been taken over, or when, where or why.

<sup>9.</sup> T.S.F.M. pp 13-14; M.M. 7-3-1893.

<sup>10.</sup> Mackay historian J.H. Williams recalled Andrew Gibson's irate reaction.

<sup>11.</sup> See Appendix E for district mills' output, 1900, 1901, 1902.

### Part thirty

## **HABANA**

#### E.M. Long

Only a few Habana farms now supply Farleigh. The bulk of Habana lands supply Pleystowe but Edward Maitland Long, the plantation's principal partner, had a profound influence on North Side affairs. If Long's connection with Pleystowe had run more smoothly he could well have owned Farleigh, although he never confirmed informed rumours that such was his intention. Many old North Side families have considered that their particular version of the Farleigh story would be incomplete without Habana being included in the narrative.

The Long brothers were from Yorkshire, the sons of Archdeacon Charles Long. George, as has been related, disappeared with the schooner *Petrel* in 1872-73. William Houston Long had a business interest in River Estate and Habana. He was a Queensland Legislative Councillor from 1873 to 1878.

E.M. Long had ambitious plans in the early seventies. To fulfil one of them he began planning, in partnership with George Smith at the end of 1873, a plantation at Mt. Blackwood. By the end of 1874 cultivation was underway. This was believed to have been for an 1875 planting, which, given a normal time lapse for plantation



E.M. Long. Photo: "Daily Mercury".

development in the period, meant a mill was probably planned for 1876. The project was recalled only vaguely later by old residents and was probably a casualty of the 1875 rust crisis.<sup>2</sup>

The Longs' connection with River Estate terminated in 1877 although Spiller was installed as manager in mid-1876. It was not one of E.M. Long's best years. He decided to stand for the Kennedy seat vacated by F.T. Amhurst when he left for England in March that year. Ratcliffe Pring, in Brisbane, wanted the seat but 28 Mackay townsmen and property owners petitioned Long to stand. He was opposed by Henry Rogers Beor, described acidly by George Smith at a Mackay election meeting as "an independent gentleman residing in Brisbane."

Long beat Beor 201–124 at Mackay and a victory celebration was held. However Mackay and Bowen were adversaries in a fight for civic prominence and Beor was a youthful protege of Premier Thomas McIlwraith. The Bowen vote went 174–7 to Beor, giving him a comfortable win. Long petitioned on 11th July against Beor's election on grounds of bribery and corruption but the allegations were declared not proven.

Long shifted to Brisbane. He became a barrister in the Queensland Supreme Court. He maintained real estate connections with Mackay. At the time foreclosure was pending on River Estate (1876) he had sold Branscombe to G.H. Maitland King.

Long had acquired a large block of rough country on the south-east corner of Hampden Parish. George Smith had an early interest in this area. When Edward Denman arrived at Etowrie in August 1873 James Muggleton, acting as Smith's bailiff was the only resident in the locality. This became Habana. Habana Estate later came to be regarded as a tract of 6,000 acres but by 1894 Long owned 7,900 acres in the locality.

Long was believed to have acquired the land as much for speculation as with intent to establish another plantation. Aneas Munro recorded that in 1881 a small dairy farm existed there employing a white man and four Islanders. About that time a few farmers grew cane either on leased land or on a royalty basis by which they were allowed use of cultivable land in return for clearing. They grew a few hundred tons for which they were paid ten shillings, "on the ground". P. McKinley was there in 1881 and became one of the few freeholders supplying Habana in the mid-1890's.4

The early crops went to Richmond, indicating both the geographic scope and the scale of the ambitions of McBryde and Finlayson when they planned their Richmond "Central Mill". Long appears to have contemplated cashing in on the early eighties land boom which accompanied the short 1881–83 sugar boom. He is believed to have tried to interest various capitalists in taking his estate. Hugh McCready and Edward Denman both assured him that the rough country at Habana, which seemed to deter buyers, could prove a canegrowing asset. In any case he decided to look for a partner with whom to build a mill.

George Smith's spirit was said to have been willing but his financial resources were stretched. He had his hands full with interests in Marian and the Victoria Sugar Company and was then negotiating for a major sugar investment by McIlwraith McEachern in London, in a large scale enterprise south of Bakers Creek.

Long finally teamed with William Robertson who had been A.J.S. bank manager in I ong's early years at Mackay. They called the plantation La Habane, then La Habana but the aspirant was not easily handled by English tongues and it became Habana. Long's brother William also had an interest as an investor. When it became known

that some of Habana's profits were being remitted to his family in England — whence W.H. Long had returned in the nineties — E.M. Long was unjustly criticised as a "traitor" to local development for sending profits away.

Machinery for Habana arrived in the vessels *Hannah Landells* and *Scottish Knight* in the first half of 1883. It was a period of dramatic port activity at Mackay. A fleet of lighters was chartered in the south, comprising the barquentines *Pentle Hill*, *Rose Hill*, *Mayneton* and the schooner *Waterwitch*. The heavy mill machinery could have holed the lighters if handled in the rough water at Flat Top so Pilot Wm. Williamson took them to the calm water of L Island passage. The S.S. *Taldora* took Habana machinery to Habana Creek wharf (Constant Creek near what fishermen today know as Braby's). There it was overlanded about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles to the mill site.

The mouth of Constant Creek was navigable for steamers up to 80 tons and a busy little port developed at Habana wharf. Corduroy logs were laid to make the road trafficable for teams during the rainy season. Probably none of the original timber is left but sections of logs can still be detected, which are thought to be more than 50-years-old.

Braby's takes its name from a square mile of country selected by Henry Braby, well known sugar mill engineer at Mackay and later at the Burdekin. It bordered the coast and overlooked what was in the early days called Habana Bay. In the neighbourhood of the old Habana wharf a substantial high blocked house was surrounded by extensive gardens. Numerous Californian fruits were grown under the care of a skilled gardener. The cultivation was successful but there was insufficient market for the produce. *The Sugar Fields of Mackay* records that in 1894 cultivation had been discontinued and a caretaker was in charge. Braby named the place Sea View. This has often led to confusion with today's Bucasia area which was called Seaview before the name was changed as a memorial to the late Fr. P.M. Bucas.

Habana mill began with a single crushing unit on 19th July 1883. The mill gearing and engine were a duplicate of one of the new River Estate mills. (Presumably the one which did not have the off side drive.) The first season's sugar make was expected to be 1,500 tons, about double the output expected at Farleigh. The opening was a festive occasion. Mrs. C.C. Rawson of The Hollow, a popular social figure, handled the first cane into the rollers and "christened" the mill La Habana. Later a ball to celebrate the opening was held at the School of Arts, Mackay.

Long contracted with J.E. Davidson to treat stored molasses, during the slack season, either at the Alexandra or Te Kowai distillery. It was a long haul and hauling during the wet season was hazardous. The arrangement was short lived. Six drays were fitted up, each with a 200 gallon tank. Old teamsters would recall that on the first trip a horse was killed coming through the Nindaroo scrub and on the second most of the drays were bogged. One tank was not removed for several weeks.<sup>8</sup>

Long began encouraging lessees from 1884 onwards, on generous terms. Later, to maintain productivity he had to become more selective of his tenants and make production performance a condition for extending leases.<sup>9</sup>

Long installed double crushers in 1885. His juice extraction was very good. The megas left the second mill dry enough to be judicially fed into the furnaces without a sophisticated drying process. Old boilermen have observed that this was an indication of high class furnace design.

Long's imagination was caught by techniques of "chemical control" being

developed by the C.S.R. Company. By 1891 he had installed extra maceration plant to extract sugar after its No. 2 mill crushing. Since he continued to burn his megas it must be assumed he then had to arrange extra drying gear. Chemical control by this time dictated the nature of the mill's shift by shift operations. A blackboard recorded tons crushed, sugar made and a variety of other details so that mill workers could compete against what technologists later would have regarded as a running coefficient of work.

One of Long's sugar boilers was T.D. Chataway, later editor of the *Mackay Mercury*. Chataway married a daughter of John Altereith, John Spiller's and Frank Amhurst's enterprising chemist. Another sugar boiler was R.M. Gunning who had worked at the Alexandra and also at Miclere where he won an award for open pan sugar in 1879. He shifted south to St. Helena and in 1883 was officer-in-charge of sugar growing and manufacturing. He returned North and went to Habana in the early nineties. His son H.W.J. Gunning and grandson P.W.K. Gunning have been prominent in Farleigh grower affairs for more than 40 years.

Long actively encouraged British migrants to come to Habana, particularly after 1889. One result of this policy significant to the Farleigh story was his engagement of Scottish engineer Thomas White. (See Part 23, "Coningsby"). He was also an early advocate of use of Japanese labour. Japanese had begun arriving in Queensland in 1889, their employment having been opposed for most of the decade by Premier Samuel Griffith.

The *Mercury* and the *Standard* for once joined forces and opposed their entry. Engaged labourers began arriving in significant numbers after 1892 and the first Japanese at Habana are believed to have arrived in 1893. At Farleigh at that time F.W. Bolton was in urgent need of productive gangs to extend his tramways following his decision to buy Ashburton and he and Long appear to have co-operated in arranging work contracts and imports. Significant numbers of Japanese arrived on both plantations in 1894.<sup>10</sup>

R.I. Robinson remembered them well at Habana in the nineties. They were clean, insisted on good quality rations and quarters and generally were good workers. Their overseers, always Japanese, insisted on a high standard of work performance provided work conditions met the terms of their contracts. "They could be cunning though", Bob Robinson related. "I remember one bunch sawing wood. They seemed to be working but the sawn heap didn't get any higher. The blighters had put on a show. When anyone came past they worked with the crosscut saw upside down."

Allied to Long's development of chemical control was his effort to have cane paid for on the basis of sugar content. He developed a scheme of payment with increases or decreases based on a pre-determined standard of commercial cane sugar content to be paid for according to a sliding scale. This was strongly resisted by P.R.F.A. members who felt they had more to gain, or at least more security, by receiving a guaranteed flat rate for tons of cane delivered. Long lost grower friends by forthrightly maintaining that there was no incentive to improve cane quality under the flat rate system. He strove to convince growers that they, as well as the mill, had much to gain from an incentive to produce quality crops.

His argument fell on deaf ears in 1894 when he offered 11/- as a base price when the C.S.R. Company was offering 13/-, increased to 14/- in 1895.

By 1891 the mill was supplied from tramways. The track grades ran downwards to the mill making the job easier for the plantation's locomotive. Tram rakes were horse and mule drawn and supply of cane arranged from drays to keep the carrier full between tram deliveries.

At that time the output was still around 1,500 tons of sugar a year; one quarter of the crop came from farmers. In 1892, 18 farmers harvested 793 acres. In 1893 their numbers had increased to 26, harvesting from 1,071 acres. The *Sugar Journal and Tropical Cultivator* in March 1892 said that Long expected to have all his cane supplied by farmers after 1893, when he looked to a sugar make of 3,500 tons. He had however, still only 26 farmers in 1896 and had 1,300 plantation acres under cane. By then he had 17 miles of tramway and one loco and the Habana community numbered 630 adults.<sup>11</sup>

Long's tramway system was solid. His portable lines were of German manufacture. His one locomotive was believed to have been German. His permanent way was believed to have been of metric specifications. A 400 ft. long wooden bridge spanned 20 ft. above the bed of Reliance Creek close to E.T. Thatcher's Amhurst Vale. 12

By 1893, 85 whites worked at the mill during the crushing, 40 of whom were permanent employees; 315 Islanders were employed and a school was built for their 40 children. A good "Kanaka hospital" was tended by an ex-army medical man. The farming population totalled 100 men and women and 82 Islanders. Early that year Long bought triple effets, filter presses and a large quantity of clarifiers and cooler plates from the failed Airdmillan mill on the Burdekin.<sup>13</sup>

The hill country which had made Habana unattractive when Long was a potential vendor at the start of the eighties stood him in good stead in the later nineties. The hill scrubs produced up to sixth ratoons. Average crops in excess of 30 tons per acre were general — twice as heavy as those across at Farleigh-Ashburton. Some of the hill farms had long "flying foxes" for delivering their cane off the high country. On "Raff's Selection" James McGinn had a wire rope half a mile down a grade of one in  $1\frac{1}{2}$ . E.T. Thatcher had 30 chains of rope and John Branckebury had both a rope and portable lines. 14

The "flying foxes" delivered bundles of cane slung from either a single pulley or a frame hung on two pulleys controlled by a brake lever. This controlled a drum on which was wound a control rope. Frayed ropes, cracked brake bands, slippery brake linings, badly slung loads and a lack of liaison between top and bottom were all hazards which were effectively overcome. Patience was a necessary virtue. If the process was speeded up beyond normal pace, inevitably something went wrong and the rest of the day's cane deliveries were likely to be a disaster.

Long's interests widened in the nineties. He acquired Pleystowe lands in partnership with William Steedman, manager of Pleystowe mill when it had closed in 1888. These two teamed with John Cook to form what became known as the Pleystowe-Balnagowan Land Sydnicate, although Long denied there was such a business entity. He did however, admit to being a member of the Pleystowe Land Syndicate, whose lands were mortgaged to the Government to secure Pleystowe Central Mill under the Sugar Works Guarantee Act of 1893. Cook's Balnagowan lands were similarly involved. As at Habana, farms were leased to settlers on reasonable terms.

Pleystowe's revival highlights changes in the business structure of the Central Mills. H.B. Black, in his recommendations which became the substance of the 1893 Sugar Works Guarantee Act had sought to place the Central Mills on "a more business like"

footing". The effect was to introduce elements akin to proprietory ownership which were not present in the co-operative style constitution of North Eton and Racecourse — the first two Central Mills. At Pleystowe a directorate of up to nine was provided for, but only three places were filled — by Long, Steedman and Cook. Long was managing director from the start. Steedman was mill manager. Cook was an old man and left decisions to Long. Between regular short visits Long did not spend much time at the mill.

Although he was regarded as tough and uncomprising, Long's Habana lessees held him in high regard, tempered a little by the fact that he would not allow them to freehold their leases (as Farleigh later did) and also by wariness of his sliding scale proposals. At Pleystowe his paternalism worked against him in two ways. Some of his tenants had begun with no capital. Long arranged to pay their fixed costs, sometimes including rations, at the mill, to be debited against their cane pays. In the bad years at the turn of the century however, there was very little money left after such costs had been deducted and these growers became disgruntled.

Another group was more formidable. Some of these were independent landholders and minority shareholders. They sought improved conditions in the miller-grower relationship and more importantly, wanted to fill some of the vacant directors' seats. They complained vigorously that Long, as the major shareholder, consistently negated

their views and requests with superior voting power.

Controversy had attended establishment of a Central Mill at Pleystowe from the start. Long's critics claimed he did not take up the Pleystowe lands until he was sure of Government backing for a mill. J.V. Chataway was alleged to have pushed the Pleystowe issue to Long's benefit. Both the *Standard* and the *Chronicle* hinted at malpractice so strongly that at a meeting on 21st March 1895, Paget asked a leading question of Chataway to give him a chance to clear himself. Donald Beaton and A.W. Fudge (who in 1904 was to win a Mackay State seat for the Labour Party) attacked Chataway, alleging in part that he had contrived, with Long, to create a boom in land prices after Pleystowe was formed.

By the turn of the century Long's standing as a public figure was high, if controversial. He welcomed the idea of Federation at a time when most people in the sugar industry were fearful of the effect it would have on their labour force. He was the first chairman of the Mackay Harbour Board (1807–1903) and was a Pioneer Shire Councillor (1897–1900). He had also been a Shire Councillor in 1880–81.15

In 1901 he was acting chairman of the Central Sugar Millers' Association of Queensland and was then trying to form a Sugar Growers' and Manufacturers' Union. This brought him into conflict with P.R.F.G.A. members who were then having a hard time keeping their organisation virile. A significant view prevailed that millers would dominate an organisation with millers and growers as members. This added heat to arguments on Pleystowe affairs, which came to a head early in 1902. In December 1901 or January 1902 Premier Robert Philp visited Mackay and was asked by a group of growers for an inquiry into Pleystowe affairs. With surprising promptness he agreed and an enquiry was announced on 6th February 1902. 16

It was all over by the middle of April. The final hearings were held at St. Helens Hospital in Brisbane where Long was an inmate. He was exonerated of any major misdemeanor, but the magistrate conducting the enquiry, Mr. M. O'Malley, criticised some of his methods and recommended improvements. The inquiry is significant in

this story for the fact that a young Philip Kirwan was among the complainant growers. Many of the complaints involved contentious issues which finally came within the ambit of the Central Sugar Cane Prices Board after it was set up in 1915.<sup>17</sup>

Late in December an extraordinary general meeting (with J.C. Bowman in the chair) was called. The Crown Solicitor advised shareholders that in view of money owed by the Pleystowe Central Mill Company a writ of foreclosure would be made.<sup>18</sup>

Long, who had continued as manager, claimed the decision to foreclose had been made while he was in Brisbane trying to sort things out with Dr. Maxwell (Controller of Central Mills) and the Treasurer. He claimed they had agreed to classify Pleystowe as a B class mill (i.e. a Central Mill in need of some financial aid). Instead they had treated it as a C class mill (i.e. subject to Government takeover). Long denied the company was in such dire distress. He created an uproar when he declared with his usual bluntness that promissory notes from purchasers or occupiers of Pleystowe Syndicate lands and the Estate of John Cook would have to be honoured by the new administration and if they weren't the landholders involved could individually face legal action. He was charged by his growers with having uttered threats but he was simply stating one of the unpalatable truths of the situation.

Long was replaced as manager by William Marshall. In March 1905 he was ill again and the *Mercury* announced he would soon leave for England. He was farewelled in May. He said there were good business opportunities still at Mackay. (He was then chairman of the Mackay Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd. which owned the *Mercury*.) He intended to be away a year but he died on 4th August on board ship in the Thames estuary before his holiday began. He was 63-years-old.<sup>19</sup>

In 1902 Long established an up-to-date dairy at Habana. Robert Irvine Robinson, who had been born at Miclere in 1883 and who had grown up under Long's tutelage at Habana, completed an agricultural course at Gatton College from 1902 to 1905. He was made dairy manager by Long's partner William Robertson after a short time spent managing a property for Robertson on the Hawkesbury River. Bob Robinson later became a director and then chairman of Farleigh. By that time he had shifted to Coningsby where he combined dairying and cane growing. He modelled his dairy on the Gatton College unit.

J.C. Penny, then Pleystowe manager, and A.A. Cook (son of John Cook) acquired a major interest with Robertson in Habana after Long's estate was finalised. The butter factory and the dairy herd were sold to southern dairymen, Messrs. Allen and Alexander in 1909. (Alexander in the late 1920's tried to interest Farleigh in coal from a small mine at Cameron's Pocket. He used to haul coal up a sloping drive with a motor lorry attached to half a ship's tank mounted on skids.)

Pleystowe built a cane tramway into Habana in 1908–9 but in the 1909 crushing only a small quantity of cane was harvested. In 1922 David Burke purchased 4,800 acres of the original estate. Pleystowe agreed to extend the tramway system if he cultivated 600 more acres. Burke augmented horse teams with a 20 horse power I.H.C. tractor and two Sunshine ploughs.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament 1860–1929 by D.B. Waterson (John Oxley Library).

<sup>2.</sup> M.M. 19-9-1874; this country finally supplied Marian mill.

<sup>3.</sup> M.M. 14-4-1877.

- 4. T.S.F.M. pp 14 and 17.
- 5. John Kerr has established that the C.S.R. Company had been approached. P.P. p 74.
- 6. D.M. Jubilee Edition 1912.
- 7. T.O. 28-7 1883; M.M. July 1883; 19-9-1891.
- 8. An old tale often retold by teamsters at Habana wharf.
- 9. S.J.I.C. 10 3-1893.
- Background to Japanese immigration is taken from local newspapers 1887–95, local recollections and The Question of Japanese Immigration to Queensland in the 19th Century (thesis 1970) by John B. Armstrong.
- 11. M.M. 25-8-1891; May 1893; T.S.F.M. pp 14-15.
- 12. I.S.F.M. p 17.
- 13. S.J. F.C. February 1893.
- 14. T.S.F.M. pp 16 and 17.
- 15. Mackay Harbour Story by H.A. Moore p 74; Pioneer Pageant by John Kerr p 226.
- 16. M.M. 6-2-1902.
- 17. M.M. 15-4-1902; 19-4-1902.
- 18. M.M. 29-12-1904.
- 19. M.M. 23-3; 9-5; 29-8-1905.
- 20. D.M. 12-1-1910 for dairy reference; A.S.J. 3-2-1922.

### Part thirty-one

## RESCUE MEASURES

The years 1896 to 1905 were rough for country people. Yet the period was marked by intense activity aimed at promoting district development. In a run of good seasons these efforts would have been reminiscent of the 1870's — a great bustle of activity rewarded by great achievements. As it happened they take on the aspect of rescue measures in a district struggling against adversity.

On the North Side special efforts were made, by land holders and townsmen alike, to rescue the area from the catastrophe which saw it left with no sugar mill and very few paying farms; but the North Side is best seen as part of the district whole.

During 1896 an idea took root that mill tramway systems held greater potential for district development than did Government railways. (A rail link with the North and South was still more than 25 years away.) In March 1897, the Pioneer River Farmers' Association even suggested converting Government railways to 2 ft. gauge to match the mill systems. The idea was as old as John Spiller's first tramway. It developed a

step further when the C.S.R. Company put down lines at Homebush and it gained credibility with the opening of the Central Mills.

In July 1896 E.M. Long, G.H. Crompton and J.V. Chataway interviewed Premier Philp advocating a link from Hamilton and Kelvin Grove (Koumala) to existing lines by light tramways. Working of these lines in the first few years would be confined to those finding the financial guarantees.

Some looked even farther afield. Veteran explorers, Andrew Diehm and Henry Bell, advocated a Clermont rail link through Ball's Gap — "westward of The Chase on the Homebush-Broadsound road, near the Alligator Creek crossing". Edmund Atherton had used it in the late sixties and A.T. Ball before him.<sup>2</sup>

A more modest proposal on the south side, was for a Government line to Sandy Creek. Another was to extend the Mackay-Mirani connection to Cattle and McGregor Creeks. This one seems to have had much to commend it, for at the time the Government appeared to be sympathetic to small extensions. W.T. Paget later declared that the proposal failed because of petty squabbles among its advocates.

The coastal projects drew a certain degree of sympathetic Government response but the Clermont link was generally regarded as one for the next generation. A western rail link was not made until 1971 when hinterland coal fields were linked to the coal port at Hay Point.

Closer to the North Side, A.M. Masterson unsuccessfully petitioned for a Government line from Mirani to the Mt. Charlton gap, in effect a part renewal of the Hamilton rail link proposals of the 1880's. This would have tapped the Silent Grove area, where William Hyne once had contemplated that Sir John Lawes might open a mill to service an estate of 20,000 acres.<sup>3</sup>

On the outer fringes of the North Side, settlers pondered over a link with Marian Mill's Hampden tramway; but here Marian had its own problems. Mt. Jukes and Hampden shareholders were threatening to withdraw their deeds if a line was not extended beyond Constant Creek along the Bowen road. They finally won but they had been ready to ask E.M. Long for a link with either his Habana or planned Mt. Jukes tramways.<sup>4</sup>

The North Side railway proposals had heavy town and country support. H.B. Black in the *Standard*, not as close now to Parliamentary sources as he had been in brother Hume's time in the House of Assembly, supported a small gauge link with Seaforth.

At the *Mercury* T.D. Chataway also approved. J.V. Chataway had been Minister for Agriculture since 1898 and Black now referred to his morning competitor as the "ministerial organ" — a reversal of roles. *Mercury* approval, he reasoned, meant ministerial approval. The proposal also drew attention to the potential for development of Port Newry, close to Seaforth.

At Hunter's Hill in June 1899, farmers and businessmen formed a committee which planned an extensive 2 ft. gauge rail system. Chairman W.T. Paget made it clear the object of the proposal was to feed country business to Mackay, not open a competing port at Port Newry, a declaration which brought the majority of the Harbour Board and the bulk of the town businessmen on side.<sup>5</sup>

Frederick Bolton, probably restrained by uncertainties surrounding Farleigh's future, supported the plan but stressed he was not speaking for his company. He obviously was beginning to assess the handling of more cane from new lands on a new

basis. Solution to Farleigh's problems involved something more complex than simply

looking for more cane to crush.

The proposed route was: from a town terminus at Sydney Street Bridge (now Forgan Bridge), Gooseponds, Beaconsfield, Inverness, The Cedars, Nindaroo, Etowrie, Habana, R. Neill's Selection 636 or Plath's Selection 614 to Constant Creek. The Constant Creek to The Leap section was to connect with the Farleigh tramway system. Bolton promised to extend his lines to the eastern Miclere boundary so as to cross River Estate to eventually join the main line at Beaconsfield.

Section distances were: Mackay-Nindaroo 8 miles, to Habana 4, to Constant Creek

51/2, to Seaforth 8, to St. Helens Creek 91/2 to Zamia Creek 12.

On the smaller branches: Constant Creek to Mt. Jukes 4; Constant Creek to Mandurana 5; Miclere to Beaconsfield 1½.

The total distance was  $57\frac{1}{2}$  miles and the estimated cost £86,625.

On 1st December 1899, the Government approved trial surveys to be made by Mr. W.D. Cooke. By May 1900 the third five-mile section was surveyed and by December the job was completed to Seaforth. In June 1900, François Tecon, a coffee growing pioneer of Helvetia Vale, Mt. Jukes, and townsman Samuel Lambert interviewed Premier Robert Philp.<sup>6</sup>

As a result a poll was held to decide whether the Pioneer Divisional Board should borrow £60,000 for the construction. Of about 1,000 eligible voters, 502 approved and

135 opposed.7

The Sugar Works Guarantee Act recurred as a suggested medium of rescue. Moves to reopen Farleigh as a Central Mill began almost as soon as the mill closed. A Nindaroo meeting urged that the S.W.G.A. and the Agricultural Lands Re-purchase Act be used to reopen the mill and purchase the estates.<sup>8</sup>

Support for the idea was not as hearty as might have been expected in a district which had fathered the Central Mill movement. One of H.B. Black's intentions for the Act of 1893 had been to put the affairs of those mills on a secure business footing. By 1900, 15 Central Mills had been established in Queensland and as Black knew, many of them were in trouble.

The more thoughtful advocates of a Central Mill at Farleigh wondered how enthusiastic the Government would be for a proposal to reopen what could not unreasonably be regarded as a lame duck, but the two local newspapers both pushed and led public opinion in support of the idea.

J.V. Chataway had died in April 1901 and W.T. Paget won the ensuing by-election. The *Mercury* still tended to be regarded as the ministerial organ although it no longer had to consider the restrictions of ministerial obligations in its editorial policy. On 25th January 1902 editor T.D. Chataway, reflecting solid town opinion, advocated a Central Mill at Farleigh drawing cane from Habana, Nindaroo, Richmond, The Cedars and The Leap.

Chataway's reference to Habana is significant. E.M. Long had not yet decided finally to close Habana and in fact the mill crushed in 1902. Long however had a developing business interest in the *Mercury* so it seems that by January 1902 Chataway was correctly assuming that Long intended ultimately to close Habana.

Many advocates of the Farleigh plan had recently been associated with proposals for a rather more ambitious application of the Sugar Works Guarantee Act. This was one of four major proposals for a local refinery. The refinery idea was not new but was

fraught with difficulties. It was recalled that Farleigh's commercial output of refined sugar had been limited and productive from Richmond's small refining plant had not been great.

A convenient starting point for recording the refinery story is a meeting of 30 people at Mirani in May 1898 called on behalf of a Mr. Sheldon, who proposed raising £1m to form a Miller's Central Refining Company. An odd feature of this proposal was the support of an ambitious private enterprise scheme from a large number of Labour Party leaders and the poor hearing it received from the district's capitalists. The scheme was long on theory and short on practicability. Before it finally withered it had burgeoned to a proposed company with a nominal capital of £5m paid to £350,000.

The Pioneer River Farmers' Association came up with a suggestion of an S.W.G.A. orientated refinery but ran into trouble from some farmers for alleged intrusion into Sheldon's proposals.

Francois Tecon circulated another scheme for a miller-grower co-operative within the scope of the S.W.G.A., "or an Act of similar intention"; 30,000 tons of raws, he said, would cost £270,000; receipts would be £397,000 for refined sugar, leaving a profit of £49,000. Tecon did not give due weight to the fact that such a refinery would be operating in a toughly competitive field against such experienced professionals as C.S.R. and Millaquin and the Poolman refinery in Melbourne, but then, he was not a man easily daunted.

The fourth refinery proposal was less publicised but it was examined by the Pioneer River Farmers' Association. It envisaged local public participation under the auspices of the Australasian Central Co-operative Company.

A meeting of millers and growers in August 1898, which examined Tecon's scheme, is notable for the spread of representation it attracted: P.M. McKenny (president) and Messrs. Rolleston, Hogan, German, Jorgensen and Stevens from south side growers. The millers comprised: E.M. Long (Pleystowe), W.T. Paget (Nindaroo), J.E. Davidson (Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Company), E. Beldan (North Eton) and E.H. Clarke (Marian). (P.M. McKenny always claimed to be the father of the 1893 Sugar Works Guarantee Act. His efforts were largely responsible for the formation of the Plane Creek Central Mill Committee of which H.B. Black became secretary.)

The millers were not optimistic. The idle Farleigh plant was a case in point. (The fate of Farleigh's sugar cube and refinery venture has been recorded by J.T. O'Riordan: "The C.S.R. Company manufactured tablets in opposition to Farleigh and the last Farleigh consignment was returned from Melbourne to be reprocessed into loose sugar. Soon afterwards white sugar manufacture was stopped (at mills) and 88 net titre raw sugar produced")."

At the beginning of November 1898 a joint investigating committee met with the P.R.F.A. They examined the proposition that a refinery would tend to increase the price for cane and that a refinery could be justified substantially on these grounds. J.E. Davidson opposed this concept and his point, that the Government would not back a refinery just to keep up cane prices, was taken.

The meeting is notable for the objective manner in which the problem was discussed. The parties finally recommended that a co-operative refinery was impracticable "at present". Thus was closed one door to Farleigh's reopening even before Farleigh closed.

Townsmen and North Side residents alike were stung into action when it seemed the

North Side tramway plans were to be shelved. This possibility became apparent when the Pioneer Divisional Board during 1902 found the construction beyond its capacity. The Government also stated unequivocably that it had no funds for the job.

The finality of the Government's stand was emphasised by the new local member W.T. Paget. D.H. Dalrymple was now the district's senior member but Paget's connection with the North Side placed the railway matter squarely in his basket. At a meeting at Hill End on 13th February 1903 he gave a characteristically sober account of the Government's financial position following the worst drought Queensland had experienced.

It was a gloomy meeting. Edward Denman recalled there had once been 87 farmers on the North Side (not all canegrowers) and this number had dwindled to seven or eight. J.E. Jane noted that agricultural land was now in worse shape than it had been to begin with. The scrub lands which once had a natural cycle of restimulation of soil fertility had reverted to lantana.

Self help was the only way out and the North Side Advancement Association was formed five days later. T.D. Chataway was appointed chairman and E.R.N. McCarthy secretary. Members included James Croker, R. Neill, H. Walker, H. Zillman, F.H. Black, C.G. Smith, J.E. Joseph, H. McClusky, T.S. Beatty, W.B. Fordyce, W.D. Cooke, Edward Denman, R. Kippen and Thomas Whitcombe. The presence of the latter was significant as he had close connection with Racecourse.

They decided to ask the Government to build about 5½ miles of 3 ft. 6 in. gauge line into the North Side, or alternatively, to ask Racecourse Mill to put in a tramway which, besides carrying cane, could convey freight to and from town markets.

The general route of either line would cross the river between Dumbleton and River Estate and meet the line recently surveyed near Richmond. Property mortgages could be offered as security, although Edward Denman remarked that in the current sorry state of the North Side economy, many properties were already heavily mortgaged.

Many members of the Advancement Association had already been active on the Farleigh Estate Purchase Committee which was formed at Coningsby in January 1902. This committee was again a mixture of town and country interests. It comprised: Chairman F.C. Macneish (also president of the Mackay Chamber of Commerce), W. Hyne, W. Marsh, S. Lambert, R. Kippen, A.H. Lloyd, A. Brookes, P. McKinley, H.L. Black, A. Gibson, P. Dunworth, R. Carswell, — McCallum, and later additions F. Bourne, P.J. Mulherin, T.W. Peele, E. Denman and H.B. Black. The committee was not interested in buying Farleigh. It gathered information and encouraged potential canegrowers with a view to attracting potential Farleigh buyers.

The tramway committee continued in action for most of 1902 until it became apparent the proposal would not go ahead. Membership then, for the most part, transferred to the North Side Advancement Association. The rail concept which had crystallised at Hunter's Hill proved to be a hardy survivor. Suggestions of a tramway link to the North Coast regions kept cropping up in connection with advocacy for development of Port Newry. Sporadically these and associated proposals intruded into some of the controversial aspects of Mackay Harbour Board affairs for another 30 years. Completion of the North Coast railway in 1923 pushed the need for a tramway into the background. Finally, nearly 60 years on, a tramway was to link Farleigh with much of the territory through which the original Government survey ran.

Whether the various organisations thrown up by the stresses of the difficult years

from 1898 to 1903 achieved anything that would not have come to pass in due course, is open to question. They did however, act positively and with optimism in a period of great depression, when the alternative was stagnation. Such an atmosphere had a sanguinary effect on a group of Bundaberg businessmen who were at that time weighing the import of national and local events and making a calculated assessment of the potential of the Farleigh Estates.

- 1. M.M. 11-7-1896.
- 2. M.S. 3-2-1899.
- 3. M.S. 1-9-1899.
- 4. M.S. 20-11-1900. Formation work had begun on Long's Mt. Jukes extension when Habana closed.
- 5. M.S. 5-6-1899.
- 6. M.C. 20-6-1900.
- 7. M.S. 17-4-1901.
- 8. M.S. 21-1-1902.
- 9. The 15 Central Mills were: Double Peak Gin Gin, Isis, Johnstone, Marian, Moreton, Mossman, Mt. Bauple, Mulgrave, Nerang, Plane Creek, Pleystowe, Proserpine, North Eton, Racecourse.
- 10. M.M. 19-5-1878.
- 11. J.T. O'Riordan's Pioneer reminiscenses D.M. 9-1-1932.

#### Part thirty-two

# BUSS AND CRAN — and others

The Farleigh Purchase Committee held its first business meeting at the office of its secretary (Mr. E.R.N. McCarthy) in the last week of January 1902.

Andrew Gibson estimated that the crop still surviving on the North Side would yield more sugar than Farleigh's final result in 1901 of 950 tons. He forecast 21,000 tons of cane, which included 1,000 or 1,100 tons from Farleigh Estate and 1,100 tons from Nindaroo and its traditional suppliers and from some of the Richmond lands. He thought £300 would need to be spent on tramway extensions to tap some of these supplies. The supply was little enough for a mill that could handle 80,000 tons but it seemed sufficient to cover operating costs should the mill crush.

Frederick Bolton, then in Sydney, was believed to be negotiating with southern buyers.

For a public body the Purchase Committee worked hard to improve the sale value of

a private company. To avoid the disruption of a mill shut-down it asked Bolton either to crush for another season or place the estate under offer for six months. This would give local interests a chance to sustain negotiations with the Government under the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act. Continuity of operations was regarded as important and advertisements were placed seeking information on the immediate production potential of lands both on and off the estate.

A significant absentee from the membership lists of the North Side "rescue" bodies was that of E.M. Long of Habana. Long was then deeply involved with Pleystowe and widely believed to have had his eye on Farleigh after Frederick Bolton notified his supplying farmers their contracts would not be renewed. This could have occurred as

early as 1898 and certainly before the planting season of 1899.

The matter was aired in a public disagreement between Long and T.W. Peele (Farleigh's secretary of the Ashburton transfer period) who was then manager of a dairy factory at the old Victoria mill. Long criticised the factory management and Peele bluntly told him to mind his own business. He said he thought Long's ambition was to own all the sugar mills on the North Side, adding: "Farleigh has long enjoyed your envious glances and will, you hope, soon come within your reach. Nindaroo already, I believe, has got the Habana tramline there". This was a reference to a quick extension Long made after Nindaroo closed in 1900, to tap cane from that mill's suppliers. Peele, it will be remembered was a member of the Farleigh Estate Purchase Committee.<sup>2</sup>

A curious feature of this exchange was that Long and Peele had recently been connected with the purchase of the *Mackay Mercury* and the *Sugar Journal and Tropical Cultivator* from J.V. Chataway. E.M. Long, A. Brookes and H.L. Black had made an agreement to purchase, with J.V. Chataway, on 30th April 1900. Long became chairman of directors of the company, registered as The Mackay Printing and Publishing Company (Pty.) Ltd. on 12th May 1900. Long was not an original shareholder but T.W. Peele was, holding one of the original seven shares which were held, one each, by seven shareholders.<sup>3</sup>

Bolton's price was quoted as £35,000, with liberal interest and terms. It was a bedrock figure even after heavily discounting George Smith's optimistic valuation of £300,000 12 years before or the written down value of £100,000 of 1897. The estates, however, would have been worth much less without a crop. The Purchase Committee also had an offer of £5 an acre but doubt seemed to exist as to whether all the non-productive acres would be included in the deal.

In May 1902, Bolton told the committee "southern interests" had broken off contact due to uncertainty about the Federal Government's intentions on sugar labour and on financial help to offset costs caused by Islander repatriation. Loss of the Islanders, which would surely follow Federation, is believed to have led to Bolton's decision to close, quite as much as drought and poor business results. Lawes' legatees were believed to have had no interest in providing the new capital which would be needed to cope with the new labour situation.

Earlier plans to secure cane supplies from up to 80 independent growers had not materialised. Bolton was thus heavily dependent on his own estates for cane and extremely vulnerable to a labour shortage.

By 1900, thoughtful sugar men realised that with Federation, black indentured labour, by one process or another, would have to go. The manner of its removal,

therefore, rather than the semantics of White Australia became a serious question, even for those who believed sugar could be produced by white labour.

Of factors outside the local scene, depressed profitability and doubt on the availability of labour were probably the most grievous deterrents to sugar investment but there were others. The perennial question of European bounties remained unsolved and local producers increasingly urged application of tariffs and countervailing duties at home rather than reliance on a settlement at remote conferences.

(Nevertheless European bounties were considered important locally. Plane Creek chairman, John Bere, made three particular points in his 1901 annual report: cane supplies were well below mill capacity; a hope that Federation might mean a better price; and the chance of European bounties being reduced.)

An adjourned tariffs conference in Europe was to resume in the latter half of 1901 but most Queenslanders felt the Australian anti-bounty movement had lost any effectiveness it might have had, although a move to disband the Anti-Bounty League failed.

At home, scars from the effects of Australian colonial tariffs were still tender. Federation had brought free trade among the States but mistrust and lack of understanding remained between southerners and sugar producing Queenslanders, although protectionist minded manufacturers felt some common cause with the northerners. With Federation and the Barton Government's declared White Australia policy, protection for sugar became a major political issue. The Federal Government legislated to licence Melanesian imports up to March 1904, to stop recruiting after that date and to begin repatriation after 1906.

North Queenslanders had been markedly pro-federationist and in the first Federal election, voters of Herbert (Mackay's electorate) had returned Labour's F.W. Bamford with a healthy majority. Northerners had thus asked for White Australia but that was small comfort to those who disagreed. Local millers wondered whether their already poor cane supplies would worsen.

The fine details of the phasing out of black labour became a lively issue. Labour party policy tended to treat sugar tariffs and indentured labour as two facets of the single issue of keeping the Queensland sugar industry alive. F.W. Bamford badly summed it up: "Opponents (of the Islander repatriation bill) don't seem to realise that Australia has made up its mind that if it must consume nigger grown sugar it will buy it in the cheapest market". This argument had been used by Victorian importers before Federation.<sup>4</sup>

The Federal Government's sugar policy hinged on the "bonus for white labour" provisions of its Kanaka repatriation plan. The P.R.F.G.A. (the P.R.F.A. was now the Pioneer River Farmers' and Graziers' Association) opposed lumping together the tariffs and labour questions. Coningsby branch affirmed the two questions were quite separate. The *Mercury* had commented nervously in March 1901 that an assurance was wanted from Mr. Barton, "that there will be no interference with the labour position". In October, following announcement of the white labour bonus details, the *Standard* sarcastically commented: "The bonus is the magic preparation, the Federal nostrum to cure all the ills of the sugar grower; Barton's bonus for blotting out black boys". Barton had replaced Griffith as the bogy of the "planters' rag".

Bolton therefore began sale negotiations against this background of doubt and argument on a matter he had always regarded as vital to Farleigh's survival — labour.

The new Federal Government already had imposed import duties of £6 a ton on cane sugar and £10 a ton on beet sugar and once the Government's intentions on the "white" bonus became clear the importance locally, of tariffs and countervailing duties, waned. To canegrowers who believed they needed the Islanders, labour was the main problem.

New doubts developed. What would happen, asked the P.R.F.G.A. branches, if the bonus did not attract a white field force. Frederick Bolton might well have asked could he raise a crop and if so at what cost. So also might have pondered a prospective buyer.

North Side identities such as Philip Kirwan an M.R.M. Shannon firmly believed black labour could be done without. Miners, timber men and shearers, they argued, had proved that white men could work productively in the tropics. The question in the canefields, to a large extent, was, "would they?" The shearers in 1891, had indicated they would, at a price. Comprehension of the fact that all that was lacking was the incentive of financial and social security had yet to dawn fully on the sugar men — to be forced on them in fact, in the not too distant future, by stringent industrial awards; but in 1902 most farmers believed white men would not provide their labour needs and for a time they were right.

Meanwhile negotiations had continued and on Monday 16th June 1902 the sale of Farleigh took place to "Messrs. Buss and Cran and others" of Bundaberg. A month later "Messrs. Cran and Wells of the Farleigh proprietory company" arrived at Mackay on the *Maranoa*.

Two matters, national and political, contributed to this happy conclusion. Firstly the manner of the application of the 1902 Excise and Tariff Act became known. This provided for the white labour bonus. An excise of £3 a ton on mill sugar would apply up to January 1907 less a rebate of four shillings a ton on cane, based on sugar content of 10 per cent, which was grown by white labour after 1st July 1902. In effect the rebate was £2 a ton on raw sugar, adjusted to a cane price according to how much cane was needed to make a ton of sugar. Farmers who had rejected E.M. Longs sliding scale now had to accept one from the Commonwealth.<sup>6</sup>

At least the position was clear, but it did not guarantee the success of white labour. This point weighed heavily with W.T. Paget who went to Melbourne as an emissary of the State Government to woo Victorian and Federal support for the views of the sugar belt. It was not an easy mission given the record of past inter-colonial differences and also Premier Robert Philp's uneasy opposition to Kanaka repatriation.

Paget addressed State and Federal politicians, the southern Press and Victorian businessmen, with persistence and transparent integrity on the matter of postponing Kanaka deportation until the bonus proposals had been given a fair trial. He appeared not as a mendicant, but rather as a contractor with a valid request for an extension of time. Before he left he had won support from a conference of the Chambers of Commerce of Australia.

Paget's Melbourne visit did not change Government policy. It was a small scene in a much larger act, but his Mackay colleagues believed he instilled an element of caution into the handling of the labour issue; and in his own electorate he provided a sense of effective involvement in national affairs.

At home, opinion was flickering cautiously to accept that the canefields labour



Frederic Buss. Photo: Buss family.

problem could be handled; and the incumbent owners of Farleigh had won a measure of prosperity in the previous three decades by reducing successive sugar industry problems to handleable proportions.

The names of Frederic Buss, John Cran, Thomas Penny and W.H. Williams were associated with the loosely termed Bundaberg syndicate, although the title of the lands was vested in the first two. Negotiated prices for the mill and estates were reported to have ranged between £35,000 and £50,000. Local reports put the price arrived at as £41,000.

The partnership was capitalised at £40,000. On 20th December 1904 this was increased to £70,000 represented by 140 £500 shares. Frederic Buss and John Cran held 40 each and 12 each were held by G.A. Buss, C.H. Buss, T. Penny and W.H. Williams. John Cran became managing director. On this date also the Farleigh Estate Sugar Company Ltd. was registered and incorporated under the provisions of the Companies Act 1863–96.7

Locally the C.S.R. Company was believed to have been involved in Bolton's early sale negotiations. Mr. John Kerr has documented a C.S.R. interest in September 1902, that is after the property was sold.<sup>8</sup>

Frederic Buss was experienced in sugar factories, plantations and sugar politics. He had arrived at Gympie from England in 1861 aged 17 years and after a short stay on the goldfields moved to Maryborough. In 1871 he married Miss Maria Howard of a well known pioneering family in the Wide Bay and Burnett districts. In Maryborough he worked for a Mr. Southerden, a general storekeeper and in 1868, in partnership with Thomas Penny, began a drapery business, which was sold to Messrs. Miller and Menzies in 1876. Thomas Penny married Frederic's sister, Annie.9

In 1878 Buss was joined by his brother George, to trade as Buss and Co. J.E. Turner joined the firm in 1880 and it became Buss and Turner. Buss became sole owner of Bonna, Pemberton and Invicta plantations, each with its complete sugar mill — not just a juice mill. Pemberton was also referred to as Pemberton–Grange.

Grange, or Woongarra Grange, had been owned by Rev. Edward Tanner, the Anglican clergyman who had been a Mackay North Side neighbour of John Spiller and E.B. Kennedy. He once stood for Parliament against Sir Thomas McIlwraith. After he died in January 1888, Grange was run by his daughter, who subsequently sold to Frederic Buss.

Originally Pemberton comprised two blocks of 340 acres and 540 acres, taken up in 1874 and settled in 1875 by Joseph White and John O'Leary respectively. In 1881, following the investment impetus given by Robert Cran's Millaquin refinery plans, W.N. Keyes, acting for a company of which he was principal, purchased from White and built Pemberton mill — completed in 1884.<sup>10</sup>

After two years Keyes and Co. sold to Buss and Davidson, who about a year later, bought O'Leary's plantation (Glenmore) on which a small mill had been built in 1882. This did not operate after 1885. Davidson later left the partnership and later again Buss sold to his sons George (G.A.) and Horace (C.H.) who operated as Buss Bros. In July 1915 they sold to Millaquin.

Frederic Buss built Invicta (at Bundaberg) in 1895. Its story had parallels with that of Farleigh. It could crush 75,000 tons of cane in six months but the largest tonnage it ever handled was 55,000 in 1917 and this was a two-year crop as there had been no crushing in 1916. Ownership was transferred to Buss Bros. in 1901. In 1919 (after crushing only 13,000 tons in 1918) the mill was sold and transferred to the Haughton River in North Queensland. Sale price was £55,000. The tender for removal was won by F.E. Barbat and Sons, of Ipswich. Estimated cost of re-erection was £100,000.

Frederic Buss was also partner with his brother C.W. Buss in Ashfield plantation (and mill) and along with John Cran, Thomas Penny and W.H. Williams owned Duncraggan (at Woongarra) and Knockroe (at Isis) plantations and mills. (Notes in Frederic Buss' handwriting give the ownership of Duncraggan as Cran Bros. and Co.) Knockroe was opened in 1893 after the "Kanaka reprieve" of 1892. The machinery came from a mill on the Bloomfield River in far North Queensland. Thomas Penny took personal control of the dismantling and loading on to several ships.<sup>12</sup>

It would seem Buss and Penny together built Knockroe. In 1883 they had also bought Millbank, on which a juice mill had been built by R.E. Palmer in 1876.<sup>13</sup>

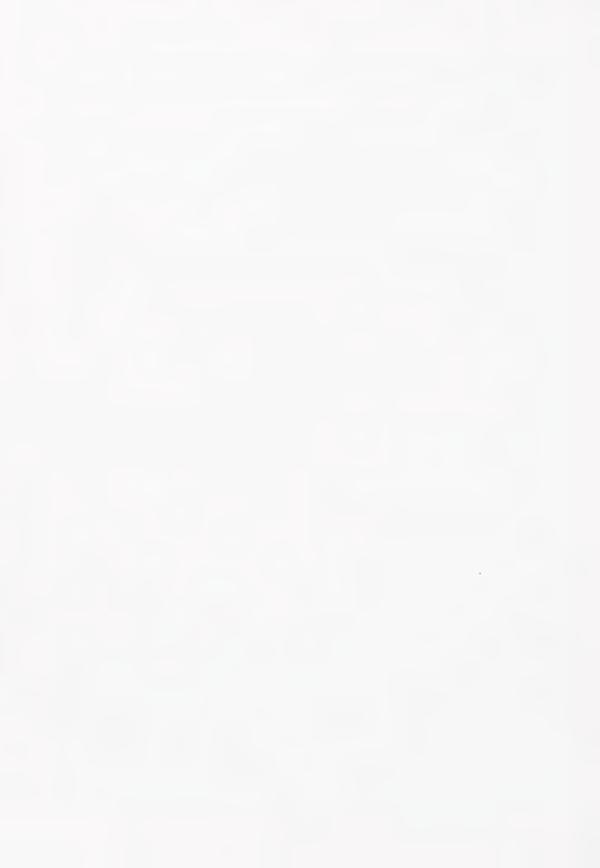
John Cran was one of four sons of Robert Cran, of the partnership of Tooth and Cran which founded Yengarie refinery at Maryborough. He supervised the laying out of the buildings for Millaquin refinery in June 1878 and immediately established a brickworks. His father left for England in October 1880 to buy machinery and Millaquin began operations in October 1882. The Queensland National Bank took over in 1896. Cran remained as managing director. He retired about 1900 with the declared intention of winding down his sugar interests.

It seems these men decided to take one or two calculated risks when they bought Farleigh.

<sup>1.</sup> M.S. 27-1-1902.

<sup>2.</sup> M.S. 9-8-1901.

- 3. The other six were: Wm. Geo. Hodges, auctioneer; Henry L. Black, auctioneer; Cecil Smith, shipping agent; A. Brookes, mercantile manager; Thos. D. Chataway, journalist and John C. Thompson, printer.
- 4. M.S. 20-11-1901.
- 5. M.S. 26-6-1902; 21-7-1902.
- 6. Q.S.I. p 28 (Easterby's explanation is a little confusing on this point.)
- 7. Jas. McGown to 1912 Federal Royal Commission; C.A.C. Certificate No. 250 Book II.
- 8. Pioneer Pageant p 136.
- 9. Details of Frederic Buss's career from Buss family records, conversations with Mr. Garnet Buss and Bundaberg News Mail centenary 23-5-1967.
- 10. Buss papers.
- 11. Buss papers.
- 12. On reading this manuscript, Mr. Rowan Croker of Mackay observed that his great grandfather F.G. Bauer established Bloomfield. Mr. Croker is a grandson of James Croker and grandnephew of former Farleigh manager J.C. Penny who was son of Thomas Penny.
- 13. B.M. 24-12-1888.





### Part thirty-three

### REVIVAL

John Cran was determined to do something about poor productivity in all sugar districts about the turn of the century. Only part of the decline was attributable to drought. A growing consensus, which found expression during the Mackay Sugar Conference of January 1900, led the industry to search for its own counter to poor prices and political disadvantage.<sup>1</sup>

Cran believed technological action taken in Hawaii to counter similar adversities could be successfully applied in Queensland; and a young Bundaberg associate, J.C. Penny, nephew of Frederic Buss and son of Thomas Penny, was connected with the Hawaiian work.

Penny joined, as a student, the laboratory staff in Honolulu of Dr. Walter Maxwell, the architect of the recovery of the Hawaiian industry and the Director of the Hawaiian Sugar Experiment Station. A year later he was the chemical controller of Ewa Mill, the largest cane sugar factory in the world.

Soon after J.V. Chataway became Minister for Agriculture (in 1898), Cran suggested to him that Maxwell be asked to investigate the local industry. The Bundaberg Planters' and Farmers' Association pressed for the appointment and the Bundaberg Manufacturers' Union backed it up. Chataway demurred at first, then agreed. Maxwell came and remained to become Queensland's first Director of Sugar Experiment Stations.<sup>2</sup>

He rated Queensland agricultural techniques as backward; Farleigh's productivity could be improved by irrigation and fertilising. This may seem to have been stating the obvious, but in those years difficulties of maintaining an effective fertilising programme were formidable. In spite of Sir John Lawes' international standing as a plant technologist and fertiliser manufacturer, Farleigh's yields had exceeded district norms only on limited areas.

Certainly Mackay provided good examples to follow. Hugh McCready at Palmyra and William Hyne at Meadowlands, and to a lesser extent Davidson at Palms, watered effectively as indeed Bolton had done at River Estate; so did M.R.M. Shannon at Barthalla on the North Side. McCready used nitrogenous fertilisers in March 1900, with "astonishing results".

Maxwell's optimism and J.C. Penny's enthusiasm for Maxwell's work are believed to have contributed to the Buss and Cran decision to buy Farleigh. The partners also had another expert to examine the proposition, in the person of James McGown. Born in Glasgow in 1851, McGown had come to Australia at the age of 12 — young enough to develop into a "true colonial". He did not retain a Scottish brogue but rather spoke with a firm non-regonial "educated Australian" accent; but to those who knew him in the prime of life and afterwards he remained a "braw Scot", in the best of the sense of the expression; capable, tough and uncompromising in reaching agreement, once his principles were laid down, but fair and flexible in its execution.<sup>3</sup>

Like many other industry identities, McGown had begun his first sugar job at the Tooth and Cran Yengarie refinery. He had been assistant manager of Buss and Cran's Duncraggan Plantation at Bundaberg but immediately before coming to Farleigh had worked a large holding of his own in the Childers area.

He quietly slipped into Mackay while Frederick Bolton was negotiating with his "southern interests". He was a forceful character and would later become the doyen of Mackay's millers, but in the beginning he conformed to Bolton's low key style of operating and remained largely unobserved.

Soon afterwards he was directed to put the estates in working order. A Bundaberg report then named him as general manager but later in Brandon Estate v. Long and Robertson litigation, involving some North Side lands, he described himself as field manager.<sup>4</sup>

Drought prevented work from starting immediately but storm rains fell in November and December and McGown arrived on the *Barcoo* on 12th December 1902 to begin work; but the drought was not quite broken. A report from Jolimont station was typical — pastures browning and stock dying in every waterhole. Nevertheless the storms had made lantana clearing and ploughing possible. By mid-1903, 150 acres were turned over, "most of it country over which lantana has been growing". One or two farmers had decided to settle on the estates.

Dry conditions had left certain problems. Large mobs of sheep had come to the coast by 1902. W.B. Fordyce recalled that the drought in 1901–02 at Richmond seemed less severe than in 1888, and 6,000 sheep were grazed on that sector of the North Side hills.

A large mob from Logan Downs was also kept moving on Farleigh's river country. When word reached Mackay that the drought had broken in the west they were moved off over night. The sheep had packed the soil hard but, more seriously, when the ground cover grew again it was heavily infested with nut grass. McGown had been given to understand that nut grass had not been a problem.

Initially farmers were told (as also were Racecourse and Pleystowe mills) that Farleigh would not crush before 1904 and that Bolton's subdivision plans would not go ahead. The latter decision was soon changed, probably on McGown's advice and certainly with his approval. His instructions were "to place as much land under cane as possible and arrange to lease the balance to suitable farmers who are willing to face the experiment of growing with white labour". 6

John Cran soon realised the plantation system at Mackay would not provide adequate cane supplies, although at Bundaberg plantations were still proving viable. At Mackay the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Company's plantations were yielding only moderate supplies to Palms mill. In the farmer-supplied Central Mills, cane supplies were tending to increase so that while district land productivity was poor, production figures for those mills tended to rise.

Four months after McGown's arrival the estate was ready for major subdivision, either for lease or purchase, with W.G. Hodges as agent. Specified amounts of land had to be put to cane and other crops could be grown. McGown did not then expect to crush until 1905 but he needed immediate plantings and he guaranteed to have crops crushed elsewhere in the meantime. The bulk of the 1903 crop was to be crushed at Pleystowe.<sup>7</sup>

The extent to which the North Side had run down was demonstrated by the fact that

McGown was unable to secure enough cane on the North Side in 1903 to plant 500 acres.8

James McGown was highly regarded for his ability "to get a crop up". He had positive views of how best to produce cane in the circumstances of the new century. He had fewer fears than many of the White Australia policy. Given proper conditions of work and management, he believed one man's productive capacity (black or white) was equal to that of several indentured Islanders. He would have approved the piecework payments Hume Black made to his Tannamen. In terms of sugar industry ideologies, he was a "planter-liberal".

A further 500 acres were planted in 1904. Farleigh's 1,000 acres plus the crops of farmers would allow the mill to open in 1905. Much depended on the farmers. The *Bundaberg Mail* in December 1902 had commented: "Having purchased this estate at practically a hang-up price, Buss and Cran should be in a position to offer first class terms to farmers".

The terms announced at the end of 1903 were indeed good. To guarantee 10,000 tons of sugar per year, farmers were encouraged by benefits never before offered with Farleigh lands: seven per cent loans; ruling district prices for cane less one shilling a ton as loan redemption; no interest before harvesting; finance to grow a crop; a guaranteed suitable proportion of cane land on each farm. Fifty farms were available and McGown offered to buy cane from anyone within reach of mill or tramways.

A seasonal target of 10,000 tons required major mill improvements. For more than 40 years, 10,000 tons as a target, in one form or another, was to prove an elusive figure. Farleigh had been called a "gigantic mill" capable of making 7,000 tons of sugar in a year and comparable with the C.S.R. Company's Homebush mill, but it was inferior to Homebush in several respects and by then Homebush was gearing up for 10,000 tons.

Homebush had been planned as a "big mill" from the start, by a highly experienced company. Farleigh began as a smaller factory, and as has been seen, its early tandem mill configuration had elements of the piecemeal about it. Even after the Ashburton transfer, Farleigh's factory had certain limitations. Surprisingly no shredder was installed. No. I mill was relied on for early preparation work. By contrast a shredder at Homebush enabled optimum use to be made of first class ancillary equipment — a large circular diffuser, cush cush brush and an elevator at the juice pump.

At Farleigh, two triple effets gave a heating surface of 8,000 square feet. Homebush had two triple effets and an intermediate pot (virtually a quadruple and a triple) with a heating surface of 9,000 square feet. Farleigh's preparation equipment was subsequently improved and it had three vacuum pans against two at Homebush. The "big mill" at Farleigh was said to be well assembled but there was an element of makeshift about it, unavoidable in a factory whose components came largely from three smaller units.

Such basic peculiarities had their effect long after original machinery items were discarded. When finally, in 1924, the mill received cane supplies in quantities which taxed its treatment rate, great feats of improvisation were performed by engineers and chemists.

Had adequate cane supplies been available earlier, there is no doubt effective improvements would have been made. The saddest aspect of Bolton's years at Farleigh was that his "big mill", boldly conceived in spite of its limitations, was never properly

tried out. The basic factory layout in 1896 was considered to be very good. It is much the same in 1983, although no relics of the old plant remain.

In reactivating the estates, James McGown struck difficulties other than a shortage of "seed" cane and inbuilt deficiencies in his mill. There was a certain lack of enthusiasm for Farleigh on the North Side in spite of the general keenness for rescue measures after the mill closed. Robert Kippen for instance, at one meeting of the North Side Advancement Association, deplored the absence of many farmers most likely to benefit from rescue efforts.

The action now was on the south side, one thread of opinion ran. Racecourse was secure and Pleystowe and Marian rejuvenated. Farleigh's smokeless stack and rusting tramlines seemed to suggest the crop should go across the river. Rumours that Farleigh would not crush before 1908 became rife and it was announced in the Press that the estates had enough cane in prospect to crush in 1904. In the event the first crushing was not until 1905.9

By then changes were in train. James McGown had begun the revival, established a cane supply and begun preparations to make sure his mill could handle it. He then returned to Bundaberg to take control of the Buss plantation and mill at Pemberton. J.C. Penny succeeded him in March 1904. Penny had left Ewa to join Dr. Maxwell in Australia as chemical inspector for the Sugar Bureau. He left this post to come to Farleigh.

Dr. Maxwell was appointed Comptroller of Central Mills in Queensland in 1905. The *Louisana Planter* commented: "The good that has come and is coming to Queensland through the advent of Dr. Maxwell is the gradual conversion of the whole of the mass of those identified with the sugar industry as its leaders, into earnest students of the industry". 10

The development of a broad industry approach to technology was accelerated by Maxwell though he certainly did not start it. The C.S.R. Company, the Crans and Sir John Lawes, locals in the various districts, such as Davidson, Spiller and Long at Mackay, early organisation stalwarts such as E.B. Swayne of the P.R.F.A. and Walter Hill and others at the Brisbane Botanic gardens and the early State Nurseries, all played a part.

Generally speaking in Queensland up to the time James McGown left Farleigh in 1904, mill chemists were an expendable species. Marian Central Mill Chairman, Mr. B. Langford, in his 1901 annual report said: "A chemist in the opinion of the directors is not necessary in the off season and that officer's services will be dispensed with in the meantime"."

A sugar boiler was less expendable and indeed his intuitive skills, learned on the job, had a place in the milling process long after regular chemists became indispensable. John Mackenzie, two of whose grandsons (Don and Rob) today supply Farleigh from Calen, was a sugar boiler at Ashburton. After his retirement, he was sought by Racecourse to help overcome recovery problems. The appointment of a top chemist as manager put Farleigh among industry trend setters. Only in 1904 did chemists begin to hold established positions in most mills. The arrival of chemists at all Central Mills in that year was regarded as having been especially newsworthy.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> Representatives at the Conference were: J. Cran (Bundaberg Manufacturers' Union), E.M. Long (Pleystowe Central Mill), W.T. Paget (Cairns District), G. Wolfe (Racecourse), E.B. Swayne

(Halifax Planters' Club), T.D. Chataway (Mossman), E. Denman and F.J. Stevens (Pioneer River Farmers' Assn.).

- The Sugar Experiment Stations Act became law in December 1900. See *The Queensland Sugar Industry* by H.T. Easterby p 197 et seq. and John Cran's remarks to the Mackay Conference M.M. 3-1-1900.
- 3. T.G. Mulherin described him this way. In interviews, North Side residents invariably referred to him as "Mr. McGown" or "old Mr. McGown" with obvious warmth and respect.
- 4. B.M. 20-12-1902 and M.S. 15-11-1904.
- 5. S.J. L.C. 15 1 1903 p 141.
- 6. B.M. 20-12-1902.
- 7. M.M. 18-4-1903.
- 8. A.S.J. 10-7-1913 p 251.
- 9. M.S. 25-11-1903.
- 10. M.M. 4-4-1905.
- 11. M.M. 2-2-1901.
- 12. M.S. 12-2-1904.

### Part thirty-four

## **TRANSITION**

Prospects for the first crushing were mixed. Cane supplies were vital to prevent mill starvation and a repeat of the crippling losses of the nineties. Farm leases were attractive as John Donnelly discovered. He had worked for Long and Robertson and in partnership with Joe Chidlow leased an Habana block; but Habana allowed no option to purchase and on learning from Patrick Dunworth that such options were available from Buss and Cran, he came across to Farleigh (where his family still remain).

James McGown's quietly maintained belief that whites could replace Islanders brought him into rare ideological agreement with Philip Kirwan. With barrister-farmer M.R.M. Shannon, a North Side Pleystowe supplier, Kirwan was a vocal member of the North Side White Growers' Association. There were doubters. Bundaberg summers, so one argument ran, were less harsh than those farther north. Crushing seasons were tough and a good performer in the South might not maintain the same sustained effort in the North.

In the beginning this argument seemed valid to some extent. Penny and McGown were both disappointed with the productivity of some of their suppliers who employed white labour, although the cause seems to have been as much inexperienced

management as Mackay's summer heat. In subsequent decades some cane cutters found Mackay more comfortable than Bundaberg. Others preferred the South and others again saw little difference provided the money was good.

New landholders who were unable to "psyche" themselves for hard work in the heat and wet, and who could not afford, or who could not satisfactorily manage adequate labour, found cane farming tough. Even when black labour was available C.S.R. Company officers realised something of this when selecting lessees at Homebush. E.M. Long initially at Habana was willing to give any man a try but later stuck to proven performers.

As recently as the 1960's when machines began to replace manual cutters, good performers from the South spoke of the need for a conscious adaption to the rigours of November and December heat. Some found a similar effort of readaption necessary for tough winter work in the South — as for instance on Victorian dairy farms. Others, presumably with a high tolerance of discomfort, accommodated without effort.

In 1906 more tangible problems threatened than the scarcely recognised need for psychological preparedness. Farmers who had chafed at the industrial demands of their Islanders had a foretaste of new dimensions in this field when they came to negotiate with white gangs.

Farleigh's first crushing in 1905 produced a profit of £4,964. Two general comments can be taken as indicative of the year and a pointer to problems ahead. "The crop appears to have been taken off with just about as little trouble as may reasonably be expected where large numbers of men who have been taught to be politicians first and workers afterwards have to do the cutting and loading operations." The portent was for industrial contention and in the next decade it came in heavy measure. In the same period many white cane cutters worked harmoniously with their employers and became farmers themselves in due course; and firm personal friendships were founded.

The *Mercury* wound up the year on an optimistic note: "Crops have been good, mill profits good and cane growers are at last beginning to recover from the financial strain of several bad seasons".<sup>2</sup>

A good season in 1906 was enhanced by the European beet industry adopting a price policy which gave cane producers better market equity. What had happened in the previous three years would have been painfully familiar to Frederick Bolton back in London; and it had an important bearing on the price the C.S.R. Company paid for local sugar. "In 1902, thanks to State bounties and cartel bounties, especially the latter, we had an unprecented fall in the price of sugar. Stocks accumulated and prices fell to 30 per cent below material costs of production. Producers were alarmed and reduced production, but that was not enough . . . . . a European drought in 1904 . . . . . large orders placed (resulting in) a large crop for 1905–6. This will depress prices."<sup>3</sup>

But cartel manipulators and political pressure groups could not wipe out memories of what happened in Germany a few years before and the drift was arrested at the Brussels Convention of 1903, to the benefit of Queensland producers.

John Cran contributed to the general spirit of goodwill and optimism which pervaded the North Side. He enjoyed coming to Farleigh and although locals later remembered him as a remote figure, in those early years he established a community rapport similar to that he had developed when setting up Millaquin.

J.C. Penny also identified well. At the end of 1905, wind-up of the P.R.F.G.A. was a possibility. In January 1906, after strenuous efforts by a few stalwarts, it was decided to keep the organisation alive. On the North Side Edward Denman had discussions with W.B. Fordyce, J.T. O'Riordan and others, including W.T. Paget, who continued to give North Side community leaders a sense of direct connection with the wider affairs of state and nation. His earlier intransigence on the matter of cane prices was largely forgiven by Edward Denman though by no means forgotten. Denman convened a meeting to form a Farleigh branch.<sup>4</sup>

Denman invited Penny to take the chair. Penny later was elected treasurer of a provisional committee which had O'Riordan as chairman, Robert Kippen vice-chairman and J. Jones secretary. Other members were: P. Dunworth, E. McCullock,

J. McCullock and T. Gaylard.

A Nindaroo branch was then operating. Its financial members were: Messrs. Colby, Birdett, Coakley, Creese, Donnelly, Denman, Fordyce, Holzheimer, Jane, Gentle, Gladstone, Paget, Shann, Stowe, Woodward and Walker. The majority of those names remained prominent in Farleigh affairs for decades ahead. Here was one of many examples in industry history of component parts closing ranks to deal with a common problem.

Many growers, of whom Edward Denman had been a vocal example, had long since grown suspicious of grower-miller membership of one organisation. In the old M.P.F.A. days the planter-millers had always seemed to achieve prior unanimity when contentious matters developed. Growers on the other hand tended to retain a diversity of views some of which crystallised only during current discussion. Now however the local Sugar Workers' Union was flexing its muscles. Although relations between its secretary John Swan and industry leaders were cordial enough, the farmers accepted the Farleigh Company as an industrial ally.

Penny soon resigned from provisional treasureship in favour of Patrick Dunworth but a month later (March) both he and John Cran were made honorary members of the new Farleigh branch. Penny also had recently been elected to the Pioneer Shire Council, having defeated Edward Denman and M.R.M. Shannon.

The P.R.F.G.A. tried hard to restore the prestige and versatility it had enjoyed in the late nineties. It aimed to re-enlist graziers (some of whom grew cane merely as a sideline) and it sought to preserve Mackay from the hazards of a monocultural rural community.

Penny's image fitted in well with these airms. He sought to have high quality corn crops for stock feed and in March 1906 the Company had a nursery plot of sisal with enough plants to establish a stand of 30 acres. If this planting was successful a scutching machine would be bought. The project seems to have been worth a try, given the budgetry importance of bags to sugar mills although Penny was later criticised on the grounds that he would have done better concentrating on the plantation cane crops.

In a variety of ways Penny came to be regarded as a bona fide North Sider. Mrs. Gibson recalls that he was well liked. He was colourful. She remembers the arrival of his new car, one of the early ones in Mackay district, as a memorable event which drew a crowd of mill people to the front of the mill office. His wife was a daughter of the Charles Walkers of Dumbleton. He was thus brother-in-law to Mrs. James Croker. Among numerous North Side interests, James Croker was then handling Dumbleton

estate affairs for Mrs. Maria Lloyd, widow of A.H. Lloyd. Since Farleigh was keen to maximise use of its Dumbleton tramway extension, Penny was more than usually interested in the break-up of the Dumbleton lands.

In the somewhat stratified Mackay society of the time, Penny was at ease in a wide range of business and social contacts in town and country. He became a canegrower in his own right when he and Robert Clarke (Farleigh's chief overseer and later to become Pleystowe manager, as did Penny also) purchased land in the hill country to the northeast of the mill which they called Wainai — the name a memento of Penny's Hawaiian days. His land holding interests were soon to extend to Beaconsfield and Habana.

In early March 1906 with a good crop in prospect and a dearth of labour threatening, the Company joined North Side P.R.F.G.A. branches in urging Government introduction of more European labourers. Back in May 1904 in line with an even earlier urging from James McGown, the *Mercury* had allied this policy with a plea for Federal Government leniency in determining which Islanders should be deported: ".... introduction of large numbers of European farmers and their families . . . . . will do more towards making Australia white than all the petty persecution of the remnants of South Sea Islanders in this State".

In recent years the Melanesian story has begun to attract the attention of expert researchers. This history seeks only to include a selection of incidents and impressions which have been noted to recur persistently in the North Side "collective memory".

<sup>1.</sup> Jas. McGown to Federal Royal Commission 1911; D.M. 2-12-1905.

<sup>2.</sup> D.M. 30-12-1905.

<sup>3.</sup> International Sugar Journal quoted D.M. 28-10 1905.

<sup>4.</sup> D.M. 18-1-1906.

### Part thirty-five

# PACIFIC ISLANDS LABOURERS

#### A Review

Melanesian Queenslanders have mixed feelings about the term "Kanaka". The North Side's best known Melanesian, Noel Fatnowna has expressed his dislike, while realising that the word carries a sense of identity. Noel Fatnowna can trace his family tree back to the fifteenth century. His grandfather was kidnapped from Malaita but subsequently signed on for a further canefields engagement. He is the son of Harry Fatnowna who settled near Richmond on the North Side. He became an honorary ambulance bearer as a young man and later joined the permanent staff of the Mackay Ambulance Brigade. In 1976 he was appointed a Pacific Islands Commissioner by the Federal Government and was awarded the British Empire Medal in the 1982 New Year's Honours list.

James McCready retained a high regard for the Islanders and condemned the word "Kanaka" as a slur. Local Melanesians are tackling problems endemic to a coloured minority with the same forbearance which made most of their ancestors suitable plantation workers and which caused Irish abolitionist Michael Davitt to record with surprise, after a visit to Pioneer Plantation (on the Burdekin), that white overseers did not carry firearms.

The same kind of humour which had Miclere "boys" name one of their horses "Old Jack Lawes" keeps recurring. An incident in a local work gang is perhaps representative. A third generation Australian Islander disagreed with an overseer and to a derogatory "Who are you?" laconically retorted. "My great-grandfather was a cannibal and he used to eat better men than you."

A stiffening of attitude on social matters in latter years is evidenced, not in terms of provocative activism but as a calculated effort to preserve and foster ancestral and community pride; and improving prosperity has enabled families to reforge links with their ancestral islands.

Intermarriage between racially pure families remains a matter of quiet pride and thankfulness, apprehension about mixed race children never having been the sole prerogative of the whites. Thoughtful parents look to increasing opportunities in education and social and professional activity, to help remove the traumas of mixed marriages. Community acceptance of such unions has increased markedly since the late 1970's.

A degree of self assertion is perhaps overdue. Through four decades of argument, many abolitionists were notable absentees from the welfare worker scene and after 1906 the Australian community largely disregarded the Islanders who remained. Good work was done by some church groups but 20 years after repatriation H.T. Easterby wrote: "Little or nothing is now heard of the blackbirding days."

A notable exception was Edward Denman. He had been a harsh critic of many of



A Melanesian congregation outside a mission building in the Farleigh district. Photo: John Oxley Library.

the "Kanaka" policies of various governments and had consistently affirmed that the Islanders' conditions in Queensland were far removed from slavery. Government officials and many of his colleagues, however, had generally missed the point of his assertions, classing him among those who tended to regard the Islanders as chattels. In fact he was well liked by his own Islanders, several of whom lived out most of their lives on his land at Etowrie. After the Melanesians were repatriated in 1906, Denman took a lead in urging a pension (subsequently granted) for Islanders left behind.

To describe the indenture system as slavery invites emotive interpretation. Some Melanesian writers and researchers have described it as just that, and with substantive evidence. Noel Fatnowna has considered the term "cultural kidnapping" an apt description. As a journalistic cliche the term "slavery" has done the cause of the Islanders' descendents in the late twentieth century poor service since it tends to discount too heavily ethnic pride and ingenuity which Melanesians used at times to good effect during their 40 years of "bondage" and afterwards.

In the context of forced recruitment, ill-treatment on the high seas, high death rates ashore and the importation of a coloured, subservient and as it transpired expendable social class, the term has some validity. Given the general record of man's inhumanity to man, life on the canefields however, was not all bad. Even in health matters where the actions and policies of the Queensland community are not easily defended, a complex set of circumstances prevailed which made a satisfactory solution difficult, given the nature of the times.<sup>2</sup>

Edward Denman told the Mackay Agricultural Conference in June 1899: "Before I was of the age a Kanaka would be permitted to enter Queensland I signed up for 14 years' service for the Queen at less than a Kanaka's pay". English artisan migrants remembered that English apprenticeship regulations bound lads for six years under conditions which were less tolerable in several respects than those applying to a three-year "Kanaka indentureship".

In the early days blacks worked 59¼ hours and whites 57½ hours over six days, although in slack periods a day's work could be much shorter. The hours had shortened by 1890 and the white week became 53 hours. The law in many instances was tough on employers. Islanders could not be transferred or exchanged without the ultimate consent of a magistrate and the immediate supervision of an inspector. This irked planters and also many Islanders but some whites remembered that white labourers in parts of Europe had less protection.

Unhappy tales survive of petty bullying, particularly of domestics. In the gossip of the North Side some mistresses were stigmatised by their peers for having been cruel to their "girls" but such tales are well matched by stories of arrogant treatment by Australian mistresses elsewhere, of European migrant girls. The majority of the North Side settlers seems to have maintained a master-servant relationship which was commendable by late-Victorian British standards. Many instances of a reciprocated warm regard survived well into the twentieth century. One of the better known was that of Alex Solomon, named Calleyho by his people on Guadalcanal, who befriended the Pratt family at Calen.

As a lad (probably in his early teens, for he never knew his exact age) he broke his hip in a fall from a coconut tree. His people were cannibals and fearful of what might happen to an injured lad, his grandmother contrived to help him escape. With three or four other youngsters he joined a recruiting ship. He appears not to have been included in any indentureship agreement — he would have been too young. His earliest recollections of Mackay district were of Pleystowe about 1888. He was at sea for several years. At one period he assisted recruitment of Islanders and helped educate recruits on how to behave in their first contact with the whites. He later told many tales of the savagery of the period, not only in the recruiting trade but among the Islanders themselves.

In the early 1930's, when he was believed to have been in his early sixties he developed a modest home and garden at the farm of the family of William Pratt on St. Helens Creek. They made themselves responsible for him and a reciprocated affection developed between the family and their permanent guest.

Mr. Alan Pratt has recalled that he and the old fellow would slip into a conversation in "pidgin" and talk with easy comprehension. Alex Solomon died on the farm on 19th December 1963. For the last 10 years of his life the first serving of the mid-day meal in the Alan Pratt home was for Alex, which Alan would take by car to the old chap's home across the farm.

In the 1930's Melanesian girls, though potentially more efficient than Aboriginals, were less tractable in service. In 1931 J.T. O'Riordan recorded uncritically: "The young women are a failure as domestic servants. They try to exhibit a feeling of equality. They dislike work but love style without having the means of living up to it. It is to the credit of all concerned that the purity of the race has remained undefiled and it will be a sad state if this condition does not continue". 3



Calleyho (Alexander Daniel Solomon) from Guadalcanal, an old friend of the Pratt family. Photo: Pratt family.

Grandchildren of the girls J.T. O'Riordan referred to are appearing in increasing numbers in the professional workforce. That "feeling of equality" is manifesting itself in efforts to adapt to the general Australian community. The white community can be thankful it did not breed an aggressive militancy.

Mackay was less popular among the Islanders than were the southern sugar districts in the early years but physical ill-treatment does not seem to have been the reason. Immigration officer Alexander Macdonald (of Inverness) denied any cruelty.<sup>4</sup>

Occasional beatings occurred. In periods of epidemics, driving gangs of ailing men even to light tasks was not a happy business. Petty bullying occurred but few overseers had the stomach for formal physical chastisement. In any case sufficient opposition to the labour trade existed among Mackay's small and isolated population to have led to an effective outcry against blatant corporal punishment.

A conspiracy of silence seems often to have prevailed among both blacks and whites, regarding punishment, indicating that certain conventions developed, governing plantation behaviour, which had nothing to do with Colonial legislation.

Incorrigible offenders were usually locked up, or chained in the open for easy supervision, pending an inspector's decision on their immediate future. Leaving aside the question of whether an Islander should have been chained or not, there were not many plantation buildings which could have held a determined prisoner; and the Islander lost no face in the eyes of his compatriots through being publicly bound, unless, as sometimes happened, he had broken their rules too.

If an Islander broke standards of behaviour expected by his fellows, retribution could be harsh particularly if it became mixed with tribal feuding. If he broke generally accepted plantation rules, he could well lose the sympathy of his fellows and punishment by his boss could well be preferable to that by his peers.

The overseer's whip, seized on by abolitionists as a token of the social degradation inherent in the identure system, for the most part remained just a token. It was rarely used on flesh on North Side plantations. It seems to have been considered necessary to show a whip in the early years before the labour force gained a leavening of experienced "boys" and plantation routines became established and understood. Practical overseers like P. Dunworth and Robert Clarke at Farleigh regarded it as unnecessary affectation.

Summary disciplining appears to have taken place on the North Side in the early 1880's, particularly in 1884 after the "Racecourse riot" at the Mackay racecourse on December 26th the previous year, when a general sullenness settled over much of the district's work force. In this period too, a new type of Islander, from New Guinea waters, began to arrive, who was less suited temperamentally and physically, than the Solomons and New Hebrideans. Their poor showing even drew derision from some of the old hands.

This tended to exacerbate tribal animosities and summary justice proved the best way to suppress trouble at its source; but these were not general circumstances although tribal feuding was always a problem. If physical force seemed necessary a planter could contact the Inspector and reassess his workforce. He would also scrutinise his overseer. Heavy handed overseers, like heavy handed teamsters were counterproductive and there were poor overseers as there were poor teamsters.





A planter would hope to see his overseer steady and relaxed and hear the somewhat monotonous singing-chant to which the larger gangs worked as a rhythmic measure of productivity and contentment. A discordant note was as significant to an expert ear as an engine miss in a later age. Men like P.J. Mulherin (who cleared land across the Farleigh–Ashburton hill country) or Harry Wright (who worked farther out on Black Mountain slopes) became proud of their gangs and the gangs became proud of their reputations as scrub droppers. As "expired boys" some of these later held Farleigh firewood contracts.

Between the gangs and their bosses a relationship developed, not unlike that between an army parade ground sergeant and his recruits. "Plenty fella fish along big hole boss", an Islander might mutter with the kind of conspiratorial grin recognised among fishermen, the morning after a Sunday excursion. "Pull-em up boat along big water", the quiet reply might well be, which meant "take the dinghy tonight at high tide and see what you can get". A good "boy" would suffer no stigma among his fellows if he became pacemaker for a good overseer but he could well become a pariah if he so performed for an unacceptable boss; and the boys soon learned how to needle a poor boss.

W.T. Paget and E.M. Long made special efforts to encourage Islanders to understand something of white man's culture. Occasional multicultural feasts seem to have been happy affairs. One night Paget brought 19 "boys" to town for an opera performance. The Press report of the visit, though a little less than gracious, was complimentary: "The niggers behaved very well, in fact better than some of the white lads at the back of the house". The Islanders enjoyed it, one of them saying, "Nice fella sing song my word". Some of Paget's colleagues felt it was a rather naive way of shouldering "the white man's burden" but given Paget's acknowledged integrity the purity of his intention is beyond doubt.

Both William Hyne and John Spiller held enlightened views on handling Islanders although the latter's more brusque approach made him less popular than Hyne. In May 1887 the Mackay Police Magistrate convened a meeting of Justices of the Peace (which planters also attended) to discuss Kanaka affairs such as possession of firearms and their presence in the municipal area.

Spiller's firearms policy has already been noted. Both he and Hyne successfully opposed keeping Islanders out of the municipal area on the grounds that it would deprive the "boys" of their much valued visits to town, these were serious matters as there were then 1,400 to 1,500 Islanders in the district and only 500 able bodied whites within practical call to deal with any possible "uprising".

During the nineties the Islanders learned to exploit the labour legislation. Local employers looked enviously northwards where the workforce seemed less well schooled in understanding the laws governing their employment. The process cut both ways. "Expirees" who became indebted to various entrepreneurs were procured for farmers at around £16 a year. The trader might then pay the Islander £8.

When a legitimate agreement ended a "boy" could either re-engage or wait for repatriation. If he re-engaged often enough he became "expired" with freedom of action and movement. He did not have to work while waiting for a return boat. If he did he could seek the highest wage a planter would pay. Many accepted a moral obligation not to remain idle but some simply asked for an unacceptably high wage. Then his last employer had to support him.

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Many had become skilled field workers. Several of these settled along the Pioneer-Ashburton road. They were second class citizens but they were free to the extent that they were not bound by the identureship regulations and in an age when even white rural families were able to live off the land with a minimum of cash income they were free to pursue their simple ambitions.

With the labour supply always below demand the M.P.F.A. and the P.R.F.G.A. had to urge members not to pay Islanders more than ruling rates. An industrial pattern developed separate from the identure system and not allied to the stirrings of organised white labour. Local employers were surprised at the detailed knowledge local "boys" had of conditions in Bundaberg. By 1906 a degree of industrial solidarity had developed along the coast and in that year an Islanders' meeting at Homebush decided that local "boys" should not work for less than a pound a week which was the ruling "expiree" rate at Bundaberg.

Edward Denman voiced a typical planters' complaint: "A Kanaka can and very often does make an agreement for a short period (as of a month) and when a month's agreement — and for that matter a day's agreement — terminates, he can, if he chooses, decline work and also refuse to return to his native island, notwithstanding his fare has been paid by the Government. He can sit down for such period as he may please and compel his last employer to provide him free of charge 2 lbs. of bread, 1½ lbs. of meat, 2 lbs. of potatoes, tea, sugar, salt etc. and lodgings and medical attention if sick and the Government will make sure the last employer defrays burial expenses if he dies".6

Sickness and death could be exploited. Sick Islanders had to be paid and some presented work exemption certificates which had been issued to recently deceased colleagues. The *Mercury* reported the detection of one "boy" in hospital who had cost his employer £80 thus far. The transgressions of a Farleigh cook reflected considerable Islander autonomy. Inspector F.C. Hornbrook told the 1889 Royal Commission he had received few complaints about food. One of these came from Farleigh where the cook was a Kanaka and gave preference to his friends.

Farleigh and Nindaroo experienced several runs of unrest from tribal feuding. Malaitamen (Solomons) and Tannamen (New Hebrideans) co-existed uneasily. The deviousness of the former provoked physical reaction from the more extrovert Tannas and neither group settled easily with the offshore New Guineans who began to arrive during the eighties.

Just as a conspiracy of silence tended to operate in the matter of plantation discipline so it did with tribal argument. This made life difficult for overseers until they learned to recognise the signs, since field gangs would not work well if they were excited or upset. Feuds however could not be long hidden. Sometimes they festered for months and factions had to be separated. Overseer Morton at Farleigh had a serious problem in the summer of 1890–91. A Lacona "boy" was murdered and three Malaitans were sentenced for the crime. Then a few months later a Laconan who had testified at the trial was murdered.

Such incidents could be said to have reflected a certain lack of control but the freedom the Islanders had to engage in such affairs and the scope they had to exploit legislative loopholes, at least negated abolitionist conceptions that the planters maintained a kind of prison compound oppression. "Polynesian" inspectors generally leaned the Islanders' way but in cases in which it might have been possible to redress

grievances through the courts, white men's sophistication tended to give the Islanders the rough end of British justice.

It has already been noted that some Kanaka-built huts tended to degenerate into sub-standard quarters. Hut fires were not infrequent. They became associated in the collective North Side memory with periods of stress, oppressive heat and the great epidemics of measles, influenza and dysentery.

Some whites came to believe the huts were burned to remove sources of infection and discomfort. Detailed research into religious and magical practices of Melanesians in North Queensland by Mackay historian Dr. C.R. Moore and a colleague, P.M. Mercer indicates such fires may have been accidents following religious type observances in which naked flames were burned for several nights following the death of an Islander.<sup>7</sup>

The pattern of well ventilated (and draughty), low roofed and low eaved barracks built by Islanders in the early plantation period was not followed by several others who later built their own dwellings in or near township localities such as Hill End (now Glenella), Habana and the Bowen Road ridges between Pioneer and Ashburton, and on to Erakala.

These were rectangular structures with thatched roof and walls. An open fireplace was set outside in sight of the only doorway. The frames were of carefully chosen round timber. The bladey grass used for thatch came just not from any patch of grass. It was cut from a tall evenly grown stand identifiable even to the uninitiated by the way it waved in a breeze.

An Islander would travel a long way for suitable material. Thatching was something he knew about and did well. The final result was a neatly finished oblong structure with a gable roof. As often as not it had no windows yet in summer it was cooler than the unlined and unceiled galvanised iron structures many Islanders later lived in and which served many white families in the years between the great wars.

The Islanders were generally gregarious. Their festive occasions were noisy, happy events. They were loquacious, even among whites whom they trusted from regular contact, but those who made these grass huts, and they were often men who lived alone, seemed to need a simple retreat. They seemed to step out of the dim interior with an air of heightened self-sufficiency as though their spiritual batteries had been recharged.

Mrs. Bob Gibson recalled a proud and orderly community of Islanders at Foulden in the early years of the century with well tended gardens and beautifully kept grass buildings with thatched roofs, very neatly finished and some larger than modern flats.

Island culture showed at its best in this type of "village". Thoughtful white observers believed that the families involved lived full days, gainfully or at least agreeably occupied, at a leisurely pace — circumstances conducive to artistic expression. The humble sugar bag was used for drapes and matting but it was likely to be decorated. Flour and water, often "fixed" to prevent flaking with a gelatin or resins brought in from the bush, formed a light background for various stains and dyes. Not infrequently kitchen colourings were used.

This happy standard tended to deteriorate in the next 20 years as Islanders absorbed white culture and methods. In the 1920's and 1930's development of shanty type housing incorporated the worst aspects of "poor" white "civilised" living and lacked the best aspects of the Islanders' crafts and comforts. Latter day Islanders live as

normal suburban residents and their interest is reviving strongly in traditional arts and crafts promoted as part of the development of a wider Australian culture.

After the "Kanaka reprieve" of late 1892 public opinion accepted that an indentured workforce was needed, at least in the short term. A *Sydney Mail* journalist took back a favourable report from Mackay. On the North Side he found that at Ashburton, of 250 Islanders, 80 had never returned home and of the others 30 had been in Queensland before. At Nindaroo, 80 of 180 had never returned home and 27 others had come back for re-engagement. At Habana, 100 of 315 were old hands and 27 per cent of the balance were returnees. Obviously local conditions were not intolerable.8

The man from the *Mail* was also surprised to be shown, on the road to Hill End, past the "new" but by then closed River Estate mill, a Melanesian teamster. F.C. Hornbrook explained that this Islander owned three teams and employed white men. He had been in Queensland the requisite number of years and was able to go where he liked.<sup>9</sup>

Abolitionists directed by far the larger part of their efforts towards stopping recruitment. Welfare on the plantations depended very much on a working arrangement between planters and Government agents. Throughout Queensland the record of Government officers was not uniformly good but at Mackay F.C. Hornbrook and Alexander Macdonald worked diligently for their black charges while one Charles Forster incurred the displeasure of the Planters' Association by severely criticising plantation health measures.

Inevitably alcohol was a problem. While wages had been held in trust and final payments scrutinised by a magistrate, the potential for large sly grog profits was limited. After wages were ordered to be paid regularly some North Side storekeepers were alleged to have encouraged purchases with liquor.<sup>10</sup>

The "boys" had district wide mobility outside working hours. This had one happy outcome. In 1886 Gilbert Turner of The Ridges and a friend Richard Naylor were caught in a tidal rip in the Pioneer River. Two Islanders, George of Oba and Joe of Malaita saved them from drowning. Both were awarded Royal Humane Society medals.

Unruly Kanakas, engaged for the most part in spontaneous and generally innocent roystering, allegedly but not always influenced by drink, led in 1888 and 1889 to agitation for a police station on the North Side. A crossroads at Mandurana, where tracks from South Side and upriver areas met the Bowen road, was a major trouble spot. Farther along the Bowen road at The Leap, were two hostelries. Hunter's Hotel was licensed. It was well known and well run. The other was a sly grog dive.

There was some cause for concern. Several violent deaths had occurred among Islanders and in 1887 a Kanaka had admitted to killing one Richard Mathews of Mackay, who did not return from an oystering trip. Despite this, such men as P.J. Mulherin, Thomas Corcoran, Harry Wright and Patrick Dunworth believed the "boys" were better letting off steam in the country than frequenting the booze-opium-brothel atmosphere of the shady section of Mackay's "Chinatown".

Not all the nocturnal noisiness was due to alcohol. Many Islanders were timid of the dark, though not timid enough to forgo group pleasures of meeting, playing and sometimes fighting. Nocturnal groups were apt to become noisy probably to cover timidity. Around the turn of the century, townsfolk declared it was risky to visit out-

of-town areas alone. Such fears were lent substance in 1902 by the murder of 12-year-old Susan (also known as Alice) Gunning at Habana by a man said to have been a "Kanaka" but who had the un-Melanesian name of Soo Too Low. The following March, Soo Too Low committed a double murder in the lock-up yard at Mackay. Susan was the daughter of R.M. Gunning (then deceased), a well known sugar boiler. (See Part 30, "Habana".)

Whites at times tended to panic. The proportion of habitual Melanesian visitors to "Chinatown's" seamy section was not high but a hard core of scallywags frequented the place along with Aboriginals, miscellaneous Asiatics and not a few whites. Some of the Islanders and Aboriginals were inveterate prowlers. If a lone white man met another white on the outskirts of town he would be prudently wary. If he met a footloose Islander he became alarmed; and as Islanders learned to needle bad bosses so they learned to needle apprehensive white citizens simply by standing and staring — and later would chuckle quietly about the encounter.

The question of liquor rations had an humanitarian aspect, as demonstrated by an incident involving the original Queensland ancestor of a prominent family of Farleigh suppliers. Samuel Dunn came to Queensland from Hunstanton, Norfolk, a district chosen as a scene for action by English writer Rider Haggard. Dunn had links with the sea and with the hotel business. The district had a seafaring tradition in which the running of cross-channel contraband cargoes was not regarded as particularly reprehensible; and every man, if he chose, was entitled to his tot, regardless of station.<sup>11</sup>

Sam Dunn was an humane employer on his Homebush district (now Chelona) farm, who would provide his "boys" with an occasional treat. One Christmas afternoon a group of Tannas, a fine bunch of high spirited young men, resplendent in colourful clean shirts and white trousers, asked him for a drink. He complied a little reluctantly for they had already been celebrating at the General Gordon Hotel, it afterwards transpired. Later they belligerently came back for more. Sam Dunn refused and in an ensuing fracas he fired a shot and his firearm broke on the body of an Islander whom he believed had been inciting the group. In fact the Islander had been trying to restrain his fellows. He appeared not to have been put out by the assault but was most upset that the gun had been broken. The group finally cut loose and did a lot of damage to horse stalls and harness.

The Inspector of Islanders became involved and the "boys" were transferred to another employer. He was not unsympathetic to Samuel Dunn's motive and he took no further action except to issue an obligatory stern caution. Sam Dunn would ruefully recall later that his generosity carried its own penalty as he lost a good bunch of workers in the transfer.

By October 1906, when repatriation was under way, the Islanders had learned a lot since the days more than 35 years earlier when John Spiller had been held off with bows and arrows. A pattern of ethnic cohesion, corporate development, industrial behaviour and a sense of property rights had developed. In the final efforts of northerners to stall the Federal Government's repatriation policy the Melanesians found themselves in substantial alliance with their employers.

<sup>1.</sup> Q.S.I. p 42.

<sup>2.</sup> Detailed research by Dr. Kay Saunders leads perhaps to a less charitable view in *The Pacific Islander* 

Hospitals in Colonial Queensland, sub-title The Failure of Liberal Principles, Journal of Pacific History Vol 2 Parts 1 and 2.

- 3. Pioneer Reminiscenses D.M. 5-12-1931.
- 4. Statement published by Sydney Mail, quoted by Dr. G.C. Bolton in A Thousand Miles Away.
- 5. M.M. 19-5-1877.
- 6. Letter M.M. 5-3-1895.
- 7. Melanesians in North Queensland: The Retention of Religious and Magical Practices, by P.M. Mercer and Dr. C.R. Moore; The Journal of Pacific History Vol 2 Parts 1 and 2.
- 8. M.M. 7-3-1893.
- 9. M.M. 21-1-1887.
- Samuel Dunn arrived in "Chybassa" in May 1882. (Some recollections suggest 1881.) Friends who arrived with him were: Messrs. J. Howard, Robt. Howard, George Windsor, Tim Curtain, W. Southgate, Mrs. Johnson (who resided at Sarina in 1932), Mrs. G. Farrelly, Mr. and Mrs. H. Howard and Mr. and Mrs. Levi Windsor.

### Part thirty-six

# PACIFIC ISLANDS LABOURERS

#### Repatriation

In April 1906 F.C. Hornbrook told the Ranking Commission there were 958 "Polynesian" adults and 64 children on his books at Mackay; 179 were "old hands". The final exodus from Mackay was therefore not large. The local Islanders did not leave without formal protests. They had acquired certain "white fella" style rights, both property and contractual and they moved to protect these in approved "white fella" style — by organising.

Such sites as the road junction at Mandurana, certain spots along the Pioneer River, Bakers and Sandy Creeks and elsewhere along the Broadsound Road had become regular meeting places for fun. Meetings on another plane at the Homebush Mission Hall led to the formation of the Pacific Islanders' Association which the Press labelled the "Kanaka Union". "Rally" type meetings attracted up to 200 persons. Routine meetings would draw up to 30. Whites would have been pleased indeed to have attracted like numbers to farmers' meetings. At the time of the Mackay sittings of the Ranking Commission, James Tait of the S.W.U. said he represented 160 members.

A need to prepare a case to put before the forthcoming Royal Commission became apparent and at this time Islanders' Association president Tui Tonga, died. Therefore there was special interest in a meeting at Homebush in February 1906 which replaced him. Henry Tonga defeated David Sandwich for the position 18–7. Sandwich became secretary and Simon Aoba treasurer.

A subcommittee to handle preparation of a case to put before the Ranking Commission was formed: George Tonga, John Ambrym, — Paloola, Bob Santo, Sandy Tanna, Johnny Api, Noah Sabbo, Alick Malacoola. Jack Leader was appointed a delegate from Proserpine. Other names which figured in Association activities were: Charlie Tonga, Joe Mai, Joe Senby and John Assai.

The Association engaged John Bombassi and Joe Suchi as paid collectors and retained Mr. A.G. Stuart as its solicitor. It soon became apparent that the Islanders' message was being imparted mostly to people already converted to their cause. Summed up, this was to seek fair compensation for assets and the right of naturalisation for any Islanders who wished to remain. One group for whom Alick Malacoola seems to have been spokesman concentrated on bald opposition to compulsory deportation. (Proper regulation of the return traffic and fear of returning to the islands does not seem to have rated as high a priority at Mackay as elsewhere.)

F.J. Stevens, of Colton Vale, an inveterate Press letter writer, and other farmers, suggested Press statements be prepared. One *Mercury* contribution from Henry Tonga read: "The Government asked us to come to Queensland. When we came, white men did not work in the canefields and the white people were very glad to get us to do so at very low wages and poor tucker". The term "poor tucker" though fair enough was bad for public relations. Latterly food was adequate. In the first two decades the strangeness and limited variety of plantation menus had contributed to discontent and serious health problems.

The statement went on: "White farmers were then very poor but through us made



Members of a band formed mainly of Aboriginals and Melanesians sponsored by the Anglican church at Mackay early this century. Photo belonged to Alex Solomon (Calleyho) — loaned by Mr. Alan Pratt.

money — yet these people want to hunt us out". (Again an unfortunate choice of words, as many farmers wanted them to stay.) "If white people insist on us going and leaving everything behind, then before the Government shift any of us, let the Government take every missionary and all other white men away from our island homes without any trouble or row with white people who have taken possession of our lands since we left it"."

Most Islanders saw "big house belongem boss" as the psychical centre of a farm or plantation. R.I. Robinson was born at Miclere and had a Melanesian "nursemaid", Strawberry. As a lad at Habana he grew up under the tutelage of E.M. Long. He was referred to by the Islanders as "white fella piccaninny b'long Boss Long upen big house".

Tonga's view that the Islanders had helped men like Spiller rise from a grass thatched cottage to a building like Pioneer House did not win him much support among the whites but his argument was valid.

Thus in the weeks preceding the sittings of the Ranking Commission at Mackay in April 1906 the Islanders struggled through what was virtually a crash course in mass communication. Although they clouded their message with non-specific arguments of an historical and rhetorical nature, they found most people in the sugar industry with whom they had close contact, agreed with them. They took some time to realise the need to sell their message to others who did not.

Names of North Siders actively engaged in preparing the case appear to have escaped record but intense interest in "big fella meeting" was displayed by the Farleigh tenants and many of the indentured "boys". By the time the Commission arrived, A.G. Stuart had nursed the preparation of a straightforward case which dovetailed with that of the whites who yet hoped for some retention of island labour.

The Ranking Commission produced a few sparks. It comprised R.A. Ranking, Stipendiary Magistrate, C.F. Nielsen M.L.A. and W.T. Paget. The Islanders received a patient hearing but E.B. Swayne and Edward Denman were minutely examined particularly by C.F. Nielsen (a Labour Party M.L.A.), in a manner which the *Mercury* described as political sniping. Ranking allowed the drift of this to continue, although the *Mercury* later declared he was fair. Edward Denman believed he detected threats in the questioning and launched into a vigorous counter submission. He was too vigorous and finally was denied a hearing.

The *Mercury*, perhaps with an anti-Labour bias, recorded discontent with C.F. Nielsen's approach and pointed out that while Swayne and Denman had been minutely examined, James Tait of the Sugar Workers' Union was given ample scope to express his views, even though he had "probably never seen a Kanaka except with his Sunday clothes on".

The Commission's terms of reference involved the handling of repatriation, not whether or not it should take place. W.T. Paget, low key as ever, directed his efforts to ensure that those terms were complied with. Some thought he could have opposed Nielsen more but he had properly assessed his task. He was ever a pragmatic administrator not a political kite flyer.

C.F. Hornbrook told the Commission that in the whole district, 46 farms were leased to 96 Islanders. There seems to have been no count taken of grace and favour plots which some farmers granted to old and trusted employees. J.C. Penny said he had 35 Kanaka tenants at Farleigh, a few Hindoos and about 12 Japanese. Farleigh it

seemed had a substantial share of Islander lessees. No evidence of the terms of the Farleigh leases have survived but it can be assumed they were not less generous than those accorded other tenants. The Commission was also told that any lessee of 30 acres needed £100 to start off so that by general commercial standards Farleigh had a considerable capital investment in South Sea Islands property holders.

Hornbrook told the Commission that Farleigh's agreements were not as liberal as those provided by John Smart, manager of Palms. This may not have taken account of liberal credits afforded by the Farleigh store, but John Smart has been remembered as being kind to the Islanders.

being kind to the Islanders.

A fairly typical agreement was described by Harry Tonga of Homebush, (presumably Henry Tonga) who said he had been in Queensland for 20 years and did not want to leave. He leased 50 acres from a Mr. Walker on Broadsound Road, paid £20 a year, had 20 acres under cane and a lease with three years to run.

J.C. Penny was prepared to go in to bat for the Islanders. He said his tenanted land had been cleared of lantana by black labour. From this point A.G. Stuart was able to adduce the argument that since this was regrowth land it had been cleared twice by black labour. This line fitted well with the Islanders' claims for a stake in the industry they helped to create.

The Farleigh tenants, and presumably those supplying other proprietary mills, were more fortunate in one important respect than those supplying Central Mills. At Proserpine (Central Mill), 11 Islander lessees were not sure they would get compensation for their crops in the event of deportation. Indeed, moves to exempt from deportation Islanders who were not properly compensated, though recommended by the Ranking Commission, failed. Dr. Walter Maxwell, as Controller of Central Mills, had stopped cash advances to Islanders for growing crops. At Farleigh these advances were maintained and it is believed compensation was paid where applicable.

When James McGown returned from Bundaberg in 1908 to take over from J.C. Penny he made sure equitable leasing arrangements continued, provided reasonable cane supplies were maintained. Problems arose later when some Islander tenants seemed not to fully comprehend that a lease not only provided them with a home but

entailed an obligation to maintain cane supplies.

George Yasserie was one of the worried Proserpine tenants. His descendants later became well known at Farleigh. For 20 years after the late 1930's Yasserie youths were prominent as canecutters, footballers and boxers. That generation of young North Side Melanesians was greatly encouraged by an highly individualistic school teacher, Mr. M.A. McColl.

Yasserie and Jack Leader appeared before the Commission at Proserpine and Yasserie made a plea on his own behalf. He was a native of Glen Isla near Proserpine. His father came from Malekula (in the New Hebrides due east of Cairns) and his mother from New Britain, (off the North East coast of New Guinea). Both had tickets (i.e. were exempt from deportation). They wanted the Government to give them a place to work and to live on. They were sure they would be no trouble to the whites and suggested Seaforth, 15 miles from Farleigh. (At that time the Government was having small success in disposing of subdivisions of the resumed Seaforth lands.) The very modesty inherent in this type of request was to cause misapprehension between blacks and whites later.

(George Yasserie later worked on Farleigh's Dumbleton tramway. He struck particularly heavy going through a hard blue metal cutting and also digging a well through similar rock near Dumbleton.)

The Islanders' organisation gained momentum after the Royal Commission had gone. They had little to hope for in two of the three major terms of reference. These dealt with the mechanics and logistics of deportation and a study of the likely labour situation after deportation took place. However the Commission had also to address itself to the question of whether "compulsory deportation would be inconsistent with humanity or with good faith". This concept became almost a text for what came to resemble a "revival" meeting in the Homebush Mission Hall at the end of April. F.J. Stevens was there by invitation.

Stevens was an uncomprising, practising Christian. The Islanders' leaders were at pains to project a similar image for the Association. George Tonga admonished the gathering to avoid the Chinese-Malay-Japanese quarter of town. Alick Malacoola said the Association did not approve of drink, gambling or immorality. F.J. Stevens exhorted his congregation to remain "respectable, God-fearing people". These pronouncements truly reflected the aspirations and outlook of the majority of the Islanders but there was an additional immediate reason to heed the exhortations to stay out of Mackay's fleshpots.

A great fear of many Islanders was not to have an adequately stocked "box" to take home, or no box at all. This would occur if the value of accumulated wages had been lost in the gambling dens of Chinatown, or in surreptitious games in the country. Some of these men, though gambling addicts, were good workers able to recoup their losses, given time; enterprising but "too smart by half". Some had previously irked farmers by hard bargaining over wages. Now they would work under any terms. Some employers felt justified in evening up old scores, others were reluctant to take on new hands lest they be charged for unexpired wages and return shipping costs.

Islander policy now concentrated on demonstrating how deportation would not be humane and could be shown to demonstrate bad faith on the part of the white community; on this theme the Association gained strength. Late in May a branch of about 20 strong was formed at Proserpine. Jack Leader became president, James Tapoon vice president, Luke Detong treasurer and George Yasserie secretary. Another was planned for Bowen and about the same time the Mackay Association decided on a petition requesting that all Islanders who wished, remain in Queensland and become naturalised.

The *Mercury* had begun sending a reporter to Association meetings and the Islanders' case benefited from professionally written and obviously sympathetic reports. Many had high hopes of remaining in Queensland. John Assai told a meeting in early June to stick together "as this country might yet be your home". Joe Tonga said there had been nothing like the Association in the old days but now they had been to school "and learned a little sense".

This approach struck a special chord with many North Side old hands who had noted the land holdings and general social acceptance of William Chambers Coakley, the West Indian who had come to Mackay in the early years of settlement and had been occasionally mistaken for an Aboriginal. His dairy farm at Mt. Bassett, stirred Islanders' property owning ambitions.

One Islander, who signed himself Alick, wrote to the Mercury. (He is likely to have

been Alick Malacoola and it is likely his friendly reporter considered the letter would have had most impact written in his own style): "A little while ago I saw in the *Daily Mercury* that the Presbyterian parsons had a big meeting in Brisbane. They say suppose Kanaka go longa home must shuttem up schools belong boy. But when suppose schools shut who catch money boy been pay to buyem ground and buildem school house longa Golden Vale? Who gotten title belonga that ground. Money belonga boy been buyem. Presbyterian parson no been give one penny. If boy have to go home Government catchem farm, horses and altogether there. Government give him money value for farm. Altogether more better Government take school too and payem back money he been give".

The Pacific Islanders' Association spread as far south as Beenleigh and finally sent a deputation to the Prime Minister. They did not arrest the tide of history but like W.T. Paget's earlier trip to Melbourne are believed to have softened at bureaucracy level the repatriation process. Nevertheless the Government did not implement two of the Ranking Commission's recommendations — one that Islanders married to women not of their island be exempted from deportation if there existed a risk to his life or that of his family and the other, already mentioned, that Islanders be exempted if they had not been properly compensated for unexpired leaseholdings.

Mackay's Dr. H.J. Taylor as a boy standing on the verandah of his family's River View Hotel (later the Leichardt) watched them depart on one of the river tenders which met their Burns Philp transport at Flat Top Island. They gathered with their wide variety of white men's artifacts — an orderly group.

Alex Solomon provided an unusual exception. It seems he had never been indentured and had been in Queensland long enough to enjoy complete freedom of movement. He was given a certificate of exemption from deportation, although as a free citizen he could have sailed away any time he wished. He didn't want his certificate — he wanted to go 'back home'. In its wisdom the white bureaucracy told him it was too dangerous for him and made him stay in Queensland. Why an Islander whose home had been the wide Pacific for several years was not able to find a boat and make his own way is not clear. Before he joined the Pratt family he lived in a large and comfortable thatched home of his own on the south side of the river.

The Australian community dealt harshly with the relatively small number of Islanders involved but social and political pressures for a White Australia were inexorable. Indeed, they were subconsciously directed even more narrowly — towards a white Anglo-Celtic-Nordic Australia as events surrounding the arrival of Southern Europeans two decades later were to show.<sup>4</sup>

On the North Side the legacy of E.M. Long's smooth organisation at Habana, the concerned paternalism of W.T. Paget at Nindaroo and the high proportion of Farleigh lessees and the wise supervision of overseers like Patrick Dunworth and Robert Clarke of Farleigh helped to reduce the potential for distress on departure day.

<sup>1.</sup> D.M. 27-2-1906.

<sup>2.</sup> D.M. references occur regularly between 10-4-1906 and 25-5-1906.

<sup>3.</sup> D.M. 2-6-1906.

<sup>4.</sup> See Part forty-seven "New Settlers".

### Part thirty-seven

# CONFRONTATIONS

#### A Price Disagreement

The initial two seasons of preparation between James McGown's ploughing in December 1902 and the first crushing in 1905 are a measure of the caution which attended the Farleigh purchase.

Many investors had lost enthusiasm for sugar. John Cran's bankers at Millaquin (and Millaquin's subsequent owners) the Queensland National Bank, were known to have become disenchanted with sugar ventures and many of the Central Mills were in trouble, only two of the State's 13 having been able to meet any part of their commitment to the Treasury in 1899–1900.

(By 1904, when the Government Bureau of Central Mills was established, Racecourse, Marian, Plane Creek and North Eton at Mackay were considered sound. Pleystowe was placed under the Comptroller of Central Mills, who was virtually an officer of the Treasury. Elsewhere only Isis, Mulgrave and Mossman were considered sound.)<sup>1</sup>

Farleigh was to be built up out of earnings. A cane supply exceeding 40,000 tons and a sugar make of 4,000 tons were minimum requirements. In theory Farleigh's three crushers made it a very large mill. (In all its life Homebush only had two.) Deficiencies Penny found in the sugar recovery section stemmed largely from the fact that since 1896 there had never been a crop to extend it, except when emergencies demanded temporary high output.

A new range of four Babcock Wilcocks boilers was ordered and by 1907 the boiler station was equipped with these and a Stirling water tube boiler, giving a heating surface of 140,000 sq. ft. and 1,400 nominal horsepower.

The 1907 crushing season was regarded as a good one although cane supplies from some areas were patchy. A crop of 48,000 tons was taken from 2,600 acres —  $18\frac{1}{2}$  tons per acre, little better than the pre-drought years of the nineties. More than nine tons of cane were needed to make a ton of sugar and the sugar output was 5,300 tons. A profit of £3,170 was recorded.

The mill's crushing train was well equipped to handle much more, with shredders, steam jets and maceration equipment recently upgraded. At the "back end" were three vacuum pans technically able to handle a 7,000 tons output and 16 centrifugals, some of which were trouble prone. The triple effets were regarded as adequate, a euphemism mill officers were to treat with utmost circumspection in the several decades which were to elapse before the recovery section was finally able to match the appetite of the milling train.

Transporting cane to the mill was a relatively costly operation as it always had been at Farleigh and as it would continue to be. The 29 miles of tramway were only three miles short of the length of line which would serve the mill from the immediate Farleigh district 50 years later.

An element of supplier discontent emerged in 1907. The Federal Government's white labour bounty had been 4/8 a ton. The Company paid 15/- for cane delivered either to the mill or to tramway sidings. From the 19/8 growers paid no freight.

In 1907 the bounty increased to 7/- and the mill price dropped to 12/-. Growers seemed to be eight pence worse off and the Company 3/- better off, although this view was based on an oversimplification of mill costs.

Complaints were not widely backed since with the freight benefit, growers were receiving a shilling a ton more than the district average and the terms of the farm leases still stood at a deduction of only one shilling a ton. However advantages were not evenly distributed. Freeholders did not benefit from the easy lease terms and growers hauling cane long distances to delivery points, felt they derived less than full benefit from the transport allowance. (Contention about equity in such matters remains close to the surface in Farleigh's affairs. Its sensible resolution has always been vital to Farleigh's corporate health.)

Most suppliers appreciated the Company's efforts in building up the mill but the "equity" argument kept recurring. For instance farmers' crops usually received harvest priority. However if sound plantation management procedures were to be maintained it was not possible to leave all the Company cane until last. Discontent stirred if a grower seemed to be lagging. It stirred even more vigorously when field officers took a hard line on cane quality, since much of the Farleigh country produced poor milling cane.

The Company's executive staff in 1907 were: General manager, J.C. Penny; engineer, A.A. Kemp; mill overseer, G. Stevenson; head overseer, R. Clarke and accountant, W. Christoe. Staff totalled 180 during the harvest season, of which only a handful were Islanders.

Penny left early in 1908 to manage Pleystowe. James McGown returned in the new year to face several incipient problems besides those just mentioned. An obvious one was cane supplies. Outsiders never seemed to appreciate how Farleigh, with its wide ranging tramway system could be short of cane. Townsmen indeed pinned impractical hopes on mill systems generally and the idea of a district-wide freight network using the cane lines died hard. The Mackay Chamber of Commerce talked about it in 1908 and a *Mercury* leader on 15th September looked forward to the day when the Farleigh system would extend to the river near the town. Farleigh's next extension however, went the other way.

James McGown was skilled in the management of growing cane. He understood soils and he understood people. He realised it would not be easy to lift the average production of his supplying lands. He therefore welcomed the subdivision of Millicent Estate, better known as Costello's after its earlier owner, J.M. Costello, Spiller's reliable field officer at River Estate. Costello had tried growing coffee and a variety of tropical plants. (His coffee was well regarded in Mackay though not as well remembered as the "B and S" brand of Blaxland and Singh at Mt. Jukes.)

The attraction for McGown was 300 acres of virgin scrub, of which in August 1910, 165 acres had been cleared and planted to cane and 70 acres had been felled. The estate was to be cut up into 30 to 60 acre blocks. McGown decided to run in a tramline. Robert Clarke was the construction overseer and the line later was extended to Barcoo.

McGown was to be disappointed with the result. In this early era of field mechanisation some land was too hilly. Some of it seemed to have too thin a skin of

productive topsoil. All the worst features of North Side scrub lands, which "Jethro Tull" had noted in the *Queenslander* in the previous century, and few of the best seemed to apply to Millicent.

Former Farleigh director J.H. Maplethorpe has recalled that at one point a ship's anchor was fixed in the ground above a paddock to act as a brake point from which bundles of cane were lowered, skip fashion to a more easily negotiated gradient. (See Part 30 "Habana" for description of flying foxes.)

Meanwhile the question of cane prices festered. Growers' costs were steadily increasing. The white work force was gradually pressing wage levels and employment costs higher and cultivation methods were changing. New implements began to appear and so new capital investment tended to push cultivation costs higher. The new machinery was labour saving to a certain extent but it did not make for spectacular gains in productivity. Keen management was needed to make the new investment pay.

Rudolph Boese's blacksmith shop, not far from the mill, became the growers' meeting spot. According to their calculations the eight pence a ton they appeared to have lost in 1907 had never been made up and they decided to seek an adjustment before the final cane pays were made for the 1909–10 financial year. They put their case to John Cran in May 1910.

Superficially it appeared the Company was retaining eight pence a ton from growers who had allegedly broken their agreements with the Company by not growing as much cane as they could have. Several growers believed this to be the case but it was a type of punitive action out of character with McGown's methods. The measurable factor which the Company complained about was that growers did not have the area the Company expected under cultivation.

Certainly forthright Company complaints about the failure of individuals to supply reasonable crops had been aired and the Company in certain cases had regarded such failures as breaches of agreement. At the conference with Cran the parties began trading verbal blows on the matter of agreement breaches, J. Devine claimed he had been left with cane standing after the 1906 season and therefore the Company had broken its agreement to harvest it.

Cran reverted to an argument which, though valid, was tending to wear thin under the pressure of immediate economic strains. He said the Company had given the growers a good start, reminding them that when Buss and Cran had first come to Farleigh the estates had been a wilderness.

Nothing was finalised. A further deputation met McGown and a bargain was struck. No details seem to be on record but McGown insisted growers who had failed to utilise their full areas lose the eight pence. This at least redressed inequities applying to noncontract growers but not in an upward direction.

Canny observers later believed McGown could have solved the problem in the first place but that he feared (accurately as it proved) that price matters contained great potential for discord and had applied certain protocol procedures to damp down the issue. Decades later T.G. Mulherin recalled that in such a confrontation McGown invariably found a common sense way out by which goodwill prevailed, at least until the next contentious point cropped up.

One of McGown's remarks provided an accurate pointer to future events and it is pertinent to recall at this point that his instinct on white labour had not been wrong (in spite of present production shortfalls) nor had his assessment of the need to subdivide the estates (again in spite of present problems).

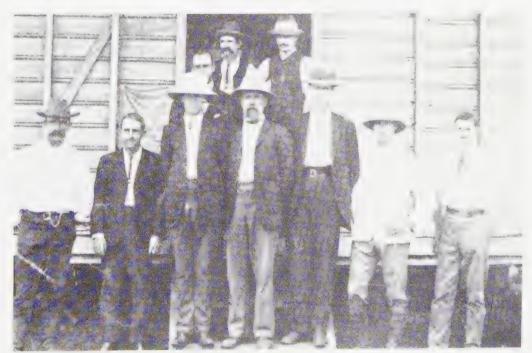
He said the owners had as yet taken nothing out of the Company. The mill was old and the outlays needed to reach present capacity very large. This was not the kind of financial load which could be borne indefinitely and he saw as the remedy a growers' take-over of the mill. Sixteen years later the then Company head, Mr. George Buss, was to express a similar view.

McGown said he thought all mills should be co-operative concerns. A tendency to view the production of sugar from paddock to bag as a unified economic operation showed up in his thinking repeatedly during the next six years of his control at Farleigh.

Some growers suggested the farmers be allowed to buy shares. Apart from demonstrating a lack of comprehension of the burden of ownership then being carried, it was not the idea McGown had intended to convey. Increasing the number of shareholders would not increase profits and few growers would have been prepared to wait as long for investment returns as Buss and Cran were doing, or to plough all profits back as they were doing.

He strongly recommended the growers "get the mill into their own hands".2

This was to prove the solution in the long run but he could not have forseen the full extent of the bitter divisiveness between miller and grower which was to precede it nor



Farleigh Staff 1910. Front row L. to R.: R. Clarke (head overseer), \_\_. Rasmussen (storekeeper), D. McGown (assistant clerk), Jas. McGown (manager), F. Hairs (timekeeper), C. Colquohoun (cane inspector), F. Hunt (assistant storekeeper). Back row L. to R.: S. Axam (mill manager), A.K. Barrie (chief engineer), W. Christoe (accountant). Photo: "Daily Mercury".

the traumas of adjustment which followed when farmers finally became millers and growers.

McGown agreed at the May meeting that the cane price basis was unsatisfactory but this view, scrutinised in detail, would scarcely have squared with that of the farmers. As a miller he was reluctant to pay for rubbish. Growers were more interested — as they had been when they baulked at E.M. Long's sliding scale — in a flat payment for the bulk of raw material delivered.

Many growers believed that the mill had been making good profits — hence the desire to buy shares. The Company was by this time operating profitably and so McGown was not advocating that the growers acquire a lame duck; but he pointed out that all profits had gone back into the Estate. This modified some discontent. He added that the mill was in "fairly good order", with its tramlines and locos. He never said what he did not mean so that "fairly good" can be taken as a definitive description of Farleigh in May 1910.

Present at this meeting were: J. Delahunty, (chairman), T. Frost, C.H. Cairns, J.T. O'Riordan, A. Furlong, R. Boese, D. McHugh, R.L. Perry, J. Hannaford, J. Devine, J. McCulloch (sen), J.J. Ready, J. Bere, M. O'Donohue, J. Donnelly, P. Dunworth and P.T. Dunworth.

In any case the mill had more cane than it could crush — 57,000 tons treated and three to four thousand left uncut. Good early growth in the spring and summer of 1910 promised well for 1911.

At the end of 1910, rumours circulated that James McGown would transfer to Palms from which John Smart was due to retire at the end of the year and McGown had to issue a special statement confirming that he would remain at Farleigh. (R.J. Thomas took the Palms post and John Smart died in 1912.)

#### The 1911 Strike

The 1910 prices argument is important, not for its vigour, which was relatively muted, but as a milestone on the road to a system of industry regulation which would become unique in Australian rural economic history. The drama of the cane prices story would intensify in a year or two.

In early 1911 a more spectacular confrontation developed. With hindsight it is appropriate to say the 1911 strike was inevitable, so early issues pointing to that inevitability are pertinent.

In 1906, after Kanaka repatriation, the P.R.F.G.A. realised it was seeking labour on a sellers' market. It decided to settle for reliability and pragmatism by negotiating on wages and conditions around a level workmen could reasonably be expected to accept. Its relationship with John Swan of the Sugar Workers' Union at a business level was harmonious and there was general agreement on pay rates.<sup>3</sup>

Many Farleigh farmers were former wages men and their collective view tended to be even more liberal than their organisation's agreed pay scales. Many had worked in mills for 55 and 60 hours a week and base pay rates were only 25/- a week in a period when living standards were rising.

John Swan had to mediate among his members on the relative merits of day labour and piece work. Industrial troubles developed in 1910 and the effect of district wages boards was being warily scrutinised by all parties.



1911 strike medallion struck by the Amalgamated Workers' Association, Photo: Tom Coogan.

In December a Trades Hall conference sought to unite all coastal unions under the Amalgamated Workers' Association of Queensland and seek: (a) an eight hour day; (b) a living wage in all branches of the sugar industry; (c) double time for Sundays and time and a half ordinary overtime; (d) abolition of the contract system.

Many Farleigh farmers found themselves in a dilemma. They didn't wholly disagree with the claims even though their own conditions were in many cases no better than those of the workers — discounting the value of the asset they held — but sudden implementation of the demands would sorely stretch their finances. This aspect in its turn tended to lead them to firmer arguments over a "just" cane price.

Conferences were sought with the CSR mills and the A.S.P.A. on mill and refinery matters and with the A.S.P.A. and the Cane Growers' Union of Australia on field conditions. This in other quarters lent fuel to the fires of disputation over the need for a single voice to speak for the sugar industry.<sup>4</sup>

These events were pipe openers. Ramifications of the problems widened. Early in 1911, with a big crop in prospect and a labour shortage threatening, local sugar organisations considered recruiting English labour.<sup>5</sup>

On 1st April the A.W.A. from its headquarters in Chillagoe, served a claim on the A.S.P.A. Three points were significant: (1) Eight hours a day in mill and field; (2) modification of canecutting agreements with deletion of the clause authorising retention of some pay until termination of contract; (3) minimum wage of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  pence per hour or 30/- per week. Apart from the reduction in hours the  $20\frac{9}{6}$  rise in wages in a non inflationary period was a stiff demand.

One other claim threw fear into the hearts of millers such as was only to be matched by Central Cane Prices Board Regulations a few years hence. This was an intention, inherent in the canecutting clause to "give workmen equal rights with employers".

President of the A.W.A. was Edward Granville Theodore. The secretary was William McCormack. Both were to become State premiers and were to be two of the most formidable politicians Queensland has produced.

Meanwhile the Federal Labor Government's Minister for External Affairs (Senator

Findley) chose to see a Queensland Government application for authority to import labourers as a potential strike breaking measure (although a strike had not yet been called) and refused permission.<sup>7</sup>

A strike was inevitable. The member for Mirani (Mr. E.B. Swayne) told a Farleigh meeting: "In the beginning of April the central executive (of the A.W.A.) told the branches they were 'preparing for a fight' and that if present demands were agreed to, others would follow, involving canecutting by contract".

Swayne's contention was borne out by a circular from McCormack which said in part: "It is our intention that no work be commenced in connection with the coming crushing and we would ask all officials to work to that end".

During June the local Wages Board fixed wages and hours for the Central Division but a few days later the A.W.A. circularised its own list of conditions. Workers had already gone out in the North. Several conferences failed and at one stage it appeared the strike might collapse but by mid-July the watersiders and seamen were involved and the will of the sugar workers stiffened.<sup>9</sup>

Organisers visited Farleigh in the last week in June. The mill had not started crushing. James McGown heard of a workers' meeting and realising that unnecessary damage could be done by pointless arguing, told all employees who wished to go to leave. Some locals left reluctantly but with a degree of reassurance from McGown's approach that they would be welcome back when the trouble was over. About 65 stopped work.<sup>10</sup>

Edward Denman chaired a growers' meeting and this highlighted several mill area tensions. Denman was a member of the P.R.F.G.A., then in wary affiliation with the A.S.P.A.

Philip Kirwan and T.F. Ross identified themselves as Cane Growers' Union of Australia men. The C.G.U.A. was well disposed towards the unions and ready enough to take a swipe at the millers. Kirwan and Ross said they had spoken to representatives

Dick Kerr loco of last century taking water about 1914. Photo: A.S.P.A.





A 1917 Avonside loco with Tom Coogan on the footplate. Farleigh cane supplier, Frank Hill, drove this loco in France during World War 1 and again afterwards on a Farleigh cane run. Photo: Farleigh Mill.

of the A.W.A. and thought that if the principle of the eight hour day were conceded, the parties could negotiate on other demands.<sup>11</sup>

This approach was what McCormack and Theodore had banked on, since one union letter had said: "Should we be successful in forcing the employers to a conference, we should then be able to introduce other matters".

Messrs. Furlong and Bailey moved that all present at the Farleigh meeting contribute three pence a ton to a strike fund; 115 Marian growers had done this on the previous day. Kirwan and Ross tried to have the matter deferred but the motion was carried almost unanimously, the meeting also promising to assist the manager in running the mill.

Ross alleged that he had been told that if he did not help in the mill he would not get his cane crushed. Kirwan said he was present when the statement was made. Later chief cane inspector C. Colquohoun said it was not McGown but farmers who had made that statement. On July 8th Farleigh's 1911 crushing started with 55 volunteers and staff manning the mill.

On 10th August the local wages board made another award. James McGown was one of the employers' representatives. The other members were: Chairman, G.H. Crompton; employers, W.J. Edmonds and A. Innis; employees, A.A. Kemp, D.A. Ross and D. O'Neill; secretary, Arthur Thompson.

A few days later the State Treasurer (Mr. W.H. Barnes) presided over a meeting of all interested parties in Brisbane and a settlement was arrived at with agreed conditions not substantially different to those set by the Mackay Board. Significant inclusions were 30/- a week and keep for mill workers, a 48 hour week with a maximum daily

spread of nine hours and overtime at time and a quarter. The millers agreed not to persist with three shifts in 1911. The strike was officially settled on 15th August after running for more than two months.

It came to be widely believed that a settlement could have been reached on 19th July when the millers offered an eight hour day but that McCormack and Theodore considered there was still some "mileage" left in their original strategy. Indications at Mackay were that by mid-August many workers in the district strike camps were ready to begin drifting back to work.

Farleigh missed much of the incidental drama of the episode — vigilante groups meeting imports of free workers at Flat Top island and haranguing them on the sometimes long waits for tides as tenders transhipped them to Mackay district strike camps; "scab" hunts, one of which ended in a fracas at the Adelaide Steamship Company's wharf before 1,500 onlookers. Mobs entered the farm of J.C. Penny at Pleystowe. (Penny was then Pleystowe manager.) A strike camp was set up at Foulden but no major disturbances are recalled be people old enough to remember.

The Farleigh men's faith in James McGown was justified. The men were received back without incident. Farleigh put on 24 immediately, put coloured staff into the fields to create more mill vacancies and planned to work double shifts.

McGown went out of his way to allay embarrassment among the Farleigh regulars. Mrs. Gibson recalls her husband's account as the men gathered to start work: "Mr. McGown met us and shook my hand. He said, 'I'm very pleased Bob to see you back'".

The employers sought to rationalise the settlement as one containing elements of victory. The settlement was a victory for common sense both on the part of the employers and the two very astute A.W.A. leaders who correctly read the signs and achieved their ends without too much permanent community divisiveness. The millers lost a lot of ground and they were to lose much more in the increasingly vigorous disagreements which were looming on cane prices.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> Q.S.I. p 38.

<sup>2.</sup> D.M. 16-5-1910.

<sup>3.</sup> D.M. 21-2-1906; 10-4-1906.

<sup>4.</sup> D.M. 29-12-1910.

<sup>5.</sup> D.M. 20-2-1911.

<sup>6.</sup> D.M. 4-5-1911.

<sup>7.</sup> D.M. 20-5-1911.

<sup>8.</sup> D.M. 30-6-1911.

<sup>9.</sup> D.M. 19-7-1911.

<sup>10.</sup> D.M. 30-6-1911.

<sup>11.</sup> D.M. 30-6-1911.

<sup>12.</sup> Editorial opinions expressed in the *Australian Sugar Journal* were examined. Conversations with men who remembered the incidents related — some of them sympathetic to the strike cause — have have been given due weight.

## Part thirty-eight

# YEOMEN FARMERS

#### Mansion and Earth Floors

James McGown's encouragement of lessee farmers set the foundations of most of today's Farleigh community. These were Samuel Griffith's "yeomen farmers" — small holders with high hopes and a reasonable expectation of improving their circumstances.

In a typical 1908 advertisement, £195 (half cash) was asked for a 137 acres lease; improved; on tramline; more than 200 tons of cane; option to purchase. With cane worth about 19/- a ton the cost was more than covered by the value of the first year's crop; and many settlers' living costs were then greatly eased by their domestic farm yard and garden. At the end of 1909 Ross and Swayne advertised Habana blocks on a basis of £5 an acre for approved ploughable land plus £1 an acre for the balance. On wages — £50 to £75 a year in 1908 and say £120 in 1912 — the cost would have been hard to save but in the next four decades many good cane cutters were able to make a farm deposit from earnings. Reliable men often had loans or guarantees from employers or local business houses. After World War I leases were often given in return for clearing or fencing.

Farms were cheap commodities to many settlers in the first 25 years of the twentieth century. Jim Noonan, uncle of Farleigh's deputy chairman of directors A.J. Noonan, won a farm at a card game and didn't know what to do with it so he took in a partner named Strobell. The farm, in the heart of the old Ashburton plantation, is today owned by Farleigh director Charles Zahra. He still (in 1982) has sheets of iron on the property painted with the names Strobell and Noonan.

A.P. Donnelly and his partner Bert Cairns decided to divide the assets of a farm partnership. Bert Cairns took the farm and Arthur Donnelly got a horse, a dray and a 1,000 gallon tank.

Harry Wright's was a classic example of a good manager receiving a just reward. In 1913 he was managing a farm at Back River Estate, near Inverness, for James Christie, manager of the firm of Marsh and Webster at Mackay. Christie and a group of local business associates foud they had a "lemon" on their hands, unbelievably at Spiller's original home block on Pioneer Estate. The previous owner, whom they had backed in various ways, had "gone broke" and Christie on behalf of a syndicate of creditors asked Wright to take the property over and get their money back.

A 25 acre paddock ran right up to the house. It is still there. A standing "plant" crop had a good stool but only the primary stick had made cane. The partners badly wanted the crop milled but Wright told them he would damage too many stools for too small a harvest and he stood the crop over. Next season it cut 40 tons per acre. Harry Wright soon liquidated the partners' debt and he was then offered the farm for £2,000, "pay when you can".

There was other evidence of farm security. The family of Thomas White moved into the Avery Coningsby residence in 1902. The building was subsequently lowered by Mr. Ken White and still stands. The Turner home at The Ridges long ago lost its grand hall and dining section and has been extensively renovated by Mr. Andrew Agius (a Pleystowe supplier).

The main section of Spiller's Pioneer house was similar in size to Farleigh House (about 7,000 sq. ft.). It had a large detached kitchen and domestic section as well. The present chief cane inspector's residence at Farleigh was the largest of four houses made from it and its various attachments and outbuildings. It had stood unoccupied for long enough (probably after A.D. Cartner died) for local fantasy to have invested it with a ghost. When Harry Wright moved to Pioneer in 1915 a substantial chimney standing over a very large stove remained, with portion of the original building which may have been the original kitchen section.

The Mulherin home at Avondale was burned down in 1913. The home of Sir John Macartney at Forest Hill was destroyed by fire in September 1905. The house was unoccupied. Lady Macartney had died in Rockhampton in May the previous year. In 1912 H.M. Finlayson's Seaforth House was in ruins. A feature of this building, apart from a grand view of the palm lined sea front, was a ballroom which could be formed by removing the walls of four rooms.

Weatherboards and chamferboards were common on farm houses in the nineties. J.E. Jane's home at Glendaragh, though substantial and comfortable was described by Aneas Munro as "weatherboard and palm". J. Gallanty at The Gorge, Habana, lived in a palm tree cottage in 1894. John Brackenbury had a comfortable dwelling at The Wolds, also at Habana, built of palm and native mahogany, ceiled, with a thatched roof. Men's quarters were of iron and wood. When Aneas Munro visited Etowrie collecting information for *The Sugar Fields of Mackay* in 1894, builders had just completed for Edward Denman, a wide verandahed, high walled, tropical homestead set on 7 ft. stumps. The building still stands.

Farleigh deputy chairman, A.J. Noonan, who was a mill cane inspector from 1951 to 1959, has a special recollection of the old Robert Martin home at Mandurana. "Frank (one of Robert Martin's sons) used to make a call seem special", he says. "The house, two storied, had an atmosphere of having been well 'lived in' in an earlier era. Fine old furniture was well kept and obviously treasured."

"Once inside you felt you had stepped back a few decades. Frank greeted you formally. You couldn't help noticing the very large moustache but the eyes made you feel welcome. He would usher you inside and go to his decanter. You selected your glass from a wonderful array of crystal. His sister, Rachel sat by quietly. She was badly afflicted with arthritis. Frank poured a drink and you chatted — interesting and stimulating conversation. Then it was business — a crop estimate, a farm measurement. As you left you had a distinct impression of physically returning to the 1950's."

A home of legendary hospitality was identified by its position at "the Pioneer gate" in the post World War I years. This was the farm home of Mrs. M. Ryan. Mrs. Ryan had earlier had the contract to run the Branscombe staff kitchen and became well known for the motherly care she took of plantation employees. At Pioneer Estate she provided similar care to a later generation of young rural workmen. After she died,

A.H. Tideman, who had bought Nebia lands in the post plantation era, described her as "one of the finest women it was possible to know".

The majority of the farm homesteads constructed in the late eighties and from then up to the years of World War I, tended to be more substantial than many which were built after the war when the farming community expanded quickly. The house which had been built by Patrick Ryan at Ryan's Hill (better known to a later generation as Croker's Hill) was a substantial residence, though not as large or elaborate as Bona Vista which James Croker replaced it with in 1909.

Farleigh board member Vince Aprile, recalls that when his father, Pietro Aprile and partners, purchased the property of Pioneer Farms Ltd. (not to be confused with Pioneer Estate) in 1925, a substantial Queensland colonial style home had already been built.

A substantial home could be built for £600 in the first decade of the century and such a home was likely to have wrought iron or extensive decorative woodwork, perhaps a leadlight front door. The "drawing room" was likely to have been ceiled with Wunderlich decorative pressed steel panels. They added little to the coolness of the room but withstood rust for a surprisingly long time. Charles Porter and Co. advertised them in 1910.

Slab huts of pit sawn timber, common to western properties, were not common among early Farleigh settlers' homes, although the Mulherin Avondale property and others like it had several slab outbuildings. Galvanised iron was relatively cheap and town relatively close. The North Side timbers, apart from blue gum and iron bark, did not last like the harder western types although sawn Mackay cedar weatherboards survived for several decades with a minimum of painting and oiling.

A typical settler's home, or a modest home of a permanently resident workman, in the early years of the century would have comprised a low blocked four roomed house with a front verandah and a detached kitchen joined to the main house by a short landing (often just a pathway), hip roofed and often concreted. The kitchen was concreted as often as not, although in many of the early farm houses some of the floors were of earth.

One old timer of a large family recalled: "We were stacked in at bedtime, with bunks on the floor. I enjoyed the noisy exuberance but one of my sisters always resented the lack of privacy". Older boys may have slept in an outside tent or bunkhouse.

A later generation has marvelled that earth floors remained dry during wet seasons. They didn't if the site was badly chosen and the floor level incorrectly built up for drainage. Wet weather induced occupants to lay down concrete more often than was the case in drier western areas.

Coping with dust was a fine art. Each night, after washing up, rinsing water was sprinkled on the floor, allowed to settle and the floor swept. The floor was also damped regularly with a mix of harsh carbolic soap. This helped control vermin and the carbolic seems to have had a compacting effect on the earth. The floor became very hard and took on a burnished look. Sugar bags sewn together were often pegged to the floor as matting. Woven palm leaves also served as floor coverings both in Islanders' thatched dwellings and white settlers' homes.

These home features reflected an acute shortage of cash income but virtually no old folk questioned can recall families being "belted down" simply by shortage of money.

Cases of distress and broken spirits were mostly caused by sickness, particularly where children died often, perhaps alcohol or occasionally gambling. The North Side usually offered sufficiently bright horizons to kindle hope in heavy hearts.

Many farm dwellings tended to be sprawling affairs, rather short on aesthetics, although there was usually a dash of colour in a well tended garden plot and a gay window curtain. Of course there were trimly kept homesteads with the conglomerate of outbuildings thoughtfully laid out. The more humble buildings were probably of galvanised iron, often unlined and unceiled — like an oven in summer and an ice box in winter. Some were of weatherboard. The detached kitchen may have had only a camp oven for a stove. Beaconlight wood burning stoves were popular for the more affluent, ranging in size up to No. 8, which was the big one.

The laundry was an appendage somewhere off the kitchen. It would have a cast iron boiler set outside. "Coppers" and stands came later. A "meat safe" hung in a cool part of the house. "Safes" wrapped in cloth, the bottom of which hung in a small trough of water served as evaporative coolers at least until World War II. Some were double walled and packed with charcoal. Butter was often hung below water level in a well

The bathroom was detached, iron walled and roofless. A round galvanised iron tub would sit on a brick floor. Water was heated over an open fire or perhaps in a cast iron laundry boiler. At the end of a short track running a chain or two beyond the inevitable woodheap was the ubiquitous earth closet. Some were camouflaged with a shrub or trellised vine. Others stood out in stark individuality. If there were no snakes in the greenery outside there were certainly geckos in the framework inside.

Some used the time honoured "pan". Some were built over pits. In unsuitable terrain these were prone to flooding in the wet. Some were built for shifting. Two bars were either built into the frame or able to be slid underneath and the whole edifice lifted like a sedan chair to be set down over a new pit. Those less well built took to removal less kindly and never regained their former symmetry after a few shifts. Finally such a one would stand manhandling no longer and the pan replaced the pit, the leaning edifice becoming a fixed landmark.

When the mechanical age took hold in the twenties, four gallon benzine or kerosene tins proved ideal receptacles; and also for laundry boilers. The pine cases in which the tins were packed, two at a time, survived in many well-to-do households as an early form of modular furniture into the 1950's.

The wood heap could provide a ready source of friction between a farm wife and her man. Throw a piece of iron bark among pieces of popular gum, or vice versa, and the stove got too hot too quickly, or vice versa, and odd things happened to bread and cakes. Wrongly stoked iron bark or blue gum could overheat the firebox and twist up or even fuse the grate bars. Bloodwood would damp down a fire and messmate (swamp mahogany) could scarcely be coaxed to burn. Its pungent smoke would gum up flues and the wood generally was an invitation to domestic discord.

The "stove recess" was a box-like structure of flat galvanised iron tapering to a hole in the top through which the chimney passed. It was an architectural monstrosity matched only for its stark functionality by the outhouse. When new houses went up among older ones and the "stove recess" melded unobtrusively into the lines of the building, something seemed missing in the same way as early jet aircraft seemed odd without propellors.

The late 1920's and the 1930's saw a proliferation of comfortable high blocked, high interior walled, wide verandahed weatherboard homes which still stand. At Kolijo, on St. Helens Creek, Mrs. Margaret McDermott built one, "Kincora" and her son P.J. McDermott, built another alongside, named "Maydale". Andrew McDermott built another similar, closer to Kolijo township and W.R. Dunn built one on an adjoining farm. This latter, now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. E.L. Dunn, is very little altered from its original design and is visible above paddocks of cane against a grove of trees, including an historic mango tree.

The first McDermott home at St. Helens was a classic pioneers' dwelling, constructed partly of bush timber and partly of material brought across in the family waggon train when they migrated from Newbury near Mirani in 1904. Part of the cladding was messmate bark, and probably iron bark, carefully removed from straight trees. This served its purpose until more durable materials arrived. The McDermott menfolk were skilled timber handlers and the final effect, particularly in a slanting sun which threw up the brown and bronze tints of the papery messmate bark, remained in the memory of the family as not surpassed in appearance by modern textures. The flooring was partly adzed timber, partly sawn timber and partly compacted earth.

A fine example of modernisation of the wide verandahed style of home stands on Main Street, Calen. Built in the 1930's by Mr. Bob McIntyre, the house is now owned by Farleigh's chairman of directors, Mr. S.O. Gordon. It is set in wide grounds flanked by trees and palms and has been given an attractive contemporary aspect with extensive use of brick and concrete, steel, aluminium and glass.

One of the first farm homestead of Pindi Pindi bricks was built by Mr. A. (Tony) Gaiotti on the south bank of Blackrock Creek in 1939. He named it "Villa Faedis", after Faedis, his hometown in Italy. It has foundations six feet deep. An original plan for a cellar was abandoned when it was realised mould problems underground would be a major wet season hazard. Fred Duratti and Tom Kilcullen were the builders. It stands amid well grown trees set back from the Bruce Highway.

Visitors to humble rural homes in the 1920's and 1930's were struck by the number of mantlepiece photographs suggesting a rather more affluent background than current circumstances indicated, a reflection of the fact that members of large families had to make their own way. After 1918 the number of servicemen's photographs attested to the fact there were few families who did not have someone reasonably close to them involved in World War I.

(For a description of aspects of Melanesian homes see the Part 35, "Pacific Islands Labourers". James Croker's Bona Vista, a survivor of a past social era, is mentioned in the Part 24, "Beaconsfield".)

## **Cultivation and Implements**

When George Wright (88 in 1983) was a young man, Philip Kirwan had been a working farmer for more than 20 years. The pair's recollection of implements spans a century. Kirwan acknowledged that some of his printed recollections contained inaccuracies but his recollections of implements and farm practices check out as reliable. He says long handled, low beam "swing" ploughs were the earliest in general use. Equipped with a straight coulter and long mouldboards, they set a furrow at an angle of 45 degrees. "A good ploughman had to know his job then", Kirwan wrote.

Gilbert Martin recalled that the overall length of some of the very early mouldboards was up to six feet, pulled by as many as a dozen bullocks. Such a team might plough little more than half an acre a day.

Kirwan says wooden harrows with iron teeth followed the plough. A triangular wooden harrow was used for inter-row work, drawn by a single horse. "Yankee" ploughs, with wide cutting shares and short mouldboards increased the width of the cut from nine to 16 inches and inverted the turned soil completely. With the 45 degree cut there had always been the risk of the turned soil falling back right side up so that with good moisture, weed growth was scarcely impaired.

Iron harrows replaced the wooden ones and Planet Junior horse hoes did inter-row work. Later the Canadian Cultivator was used for inter-row work. This "scuffler" in one form or another was still used after World War II. It could be fitted with a variety of tynes and/or light "hiller boards". Kirwan says W.H. Hyne introduced sulky ploughs with a seat instead of handles and requiring six horses instead of three. Farleigh and Ashburton soon followed.

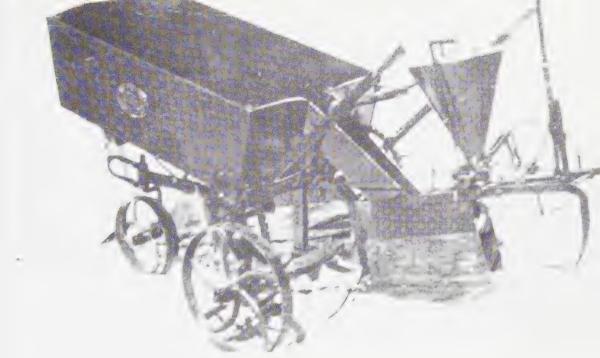
Ploughmen lightened the implement by discarding wheels and seats and fixing handles, enabling the horse team to be reduced to three. The "Yankee" ploughs had a light draught and developing from this feature, N.P. Willman of Mackay and H. Mann of Pinnacle made improvements. In 1933 Mann's sons Harry and Archie, trading as Mann Bros. of Calen, made a "standardised" swing plough of which 90 were sold in two years. Sizes ranged from a one-horse six inch cut to a light three-horse ten inch cut.

Kirwan says both Willman and Mann adopted a fixed revolving coulter in place of a swinging coulter which had been a feature of the Yankee. He says that when disc ploughs came in "gone were the handles and gone were the competent ploughmen — anyone who could harness horses could plough". Modern farmers might not totally agree. Disc ploughs still need to be properly "set up" and a poorly set plough behind a high powered tractor, with an inexperienced driver, which is likely to be the case if the plough is badly set, can be a cultivation disaster.

Kirwan's description of planting cane at The Cedars has been noted. Hand planting was usually done on contract at a unit rate per 100 plants. "Picking in" was the more popular process because it was faster. Cane plants were placed in narrow openings left by a pick and trodden in by foot. "Holing" involved digging a hole with a mattock about nine inches long by six wide and up to a foot deep. As young shoots grew, the hole was gradually raked in and weed growth thus controlled.

T.F. Ross from whom T.A. Powell purchased the present Powell family property at Foulden in 1911, developed a cutting device in 1911 but it was to be 20 years before satisfactory cutter planters developed. Various box type devices holding cut plants and mounted over a grubber assembly were developed in various sugar districts. George Wright says he was the first person on the North Side to drop plants from a Stirling planter (in 1912 or 1913). This was on James Christie's Back River Estate farm (River Estate North). Christie sent one out from Marsh and Webster in Mackay for a trial.

The Stirling had a fixed grubber. C.A. (Charlie) Hodge, farming at Glenalbyn, developed a better "drop" planter, in a farm workshop which was to develop into the multi-million dollar enterprise today known as Hodge Industries. Hodge's planter had a floating grubber which made it more versatile and easier to handle. Hodge did not



C.A. Hodge 1923 'drop' planter. Photo: A.C. Hodge.

then sell planters commercially but made them as a favour to neighbours. W. Punzell at Mackay also made a drop planter.

It is appropriate here to run ahead of the main story to relate the development of the Hodge enterprise. Charlie Hodge owned three Farleigh farms. In 1923 he shifted to Cotherstone (named, it will be recalled, by Mrs. Charles Walker of Dumbleton) and pioneered the third farm in the sandy country near Shoal Point. Hodge worked on a cutter planter at Cotherstone and had a commercial model ready in 1932. In the early 1930's A.B. Milne marketed a cutter planter with a cutting blade activated by a reciprocating device, similar to the idea T.F. Ross had worked on in 1911. Hodge's cutting mechanism was a rotary action worked from the axle of the implement. Fifty years later it remains substantially the same.

Early in World War II the Menzies Government, under National Emergency Regulations, declared the Hodge cutter planter a major labour saving device and decreed that owners should, if called on, let them out, as a contribution to manpower savings.

More will be told of the Hodge spinner weeder when this story returns shortly to chronological sequence. When mechanical cane loaders appeared in the 1950's the Hodge workshop developed a quick hitch model that did not tie a tractor to just the one job of loading. In 1967, production models of the Hodge reversible disc plough were produced. This later earned a letter of credit and a Merit Award from the Design Council of Australia.

Charlie Hodge's son A.C. (Mick) Hodge today controls the family enterprise, Hodge Industries. The family in their farming history supplied only Farleigh but are no longer farmers. Hodge Industries currently supplies a home and export market grossing between \$3m and \$5m in turnover. In 1981 the enterprise received the Small



Pre-1914 'drop' planter — unusual because most 'drop' types needed three horses. Photo: A.S.P.A.

Business Award for Queensland and the National Award in 1982, presented by the Department of Industrial Development.

David (Sailor) Treacy, who developed the Treacy cane lift in 1947, powered by driving the wheels of cane lorries on twin sets of rollers, was a Hodge staff member at the time. Treacy recorded that he received great co-operation from the firm though they had no financial interest in the invention. More than 200 of these lifts were sold in Queensland and a few went overseas but the extension of electricity supplies in the early 1950's superceded the need for the friction driven device.

"Sailor" Treacy later said Farleigh manager G.W. Shaw helped him greatly by agreeing that Farleigh mill would pay the full cost of each installation as soon as a lift was working and recover the cost from farmers by a mill-grower agreement.

Back again now to the nineteenth century. Edward Denman and Philip Kirwan credited R.D. Dunne with having improved Mackay district rationing techniques. (Ration derives from a Spanish word indicating regrowth from an earlier developed root system.) Denman was amazed on arrival at Mackay in 1872 to find a system of "relieving" rations by throwing furrows away from each side of the cane stools after harvest. He declared forthrightly that it led to gross waste of soil moisture. He said David Jack at The Barrie and Dunne at Nebia improved on this.

Kirwan says Dunne introduced a "hilling up" system and also one of planting in "beds" divided by water furrows, a system which was encouraged later by the C.S.R. Company at Homebush. All too often in later years "bedding" was expected to handle surplus water which should have been coped with by off-paddock draining. It tended to promote unevenness across a paddock unless ploughmen were expert at filling in old water furrows.

George Wright, whose youthful experience was at Palms rather than at Farleigh, remembers that Islanders used to rake residual trash after harvest into water furrows.



Planting with a Hodge cutter planter. Photo: George Wright.

The idea was to promote tilth and help condition the soil for when the paddock was next fully ploughed. Those trash rows were a great breeding ground for cane grubs.

Wright says the American sulky plough came to be regarded as too light. A swing plough drawn by three horses was a common implement at the turn of the century for breaking up fallow. Disc harrows and bumper discs began to appear, although for many years many farmers did not own them. "Working down" of freshly broken soil was achieved by frequent tyne harrowing.

With the passing of large field gangs with their hoes, swing ploughs were used to "cut away" from emerging cane plants — up one side of a row and down the other, leaving a ridge still covering the young shoots. This was raked off by pronged hoes. A good man would work two acres a day, fork hoeing the central ridge off the emerging shoots. In grassy ground the work was harder and progress slower. George Wright recalls: "I worked with a hoe for Bill McCready at Palmyra at three pence a chain, in ground that was full of couch grass. A lot of this chipping was done on contract".

The Hodge spinner weeder — or "chipper" as farmers called it — did away with the need for most of this hoeing. Charlie Hodge developed it at Glenalbyn and patented it in 1916. Camerons' Foundry made some for a year or two but after that he made his own. By 1923 they were in wide general use. A long article in the Prosperine *Guardian* that year hailed the implement as a major breakthrough in farm labour saving machinery. Hodge spinners are still widely used and the idea is now used by other manufacturers.

N.P. Willman produced a chipper which had a run for a few years. George Wright says: "I remember he brought one out to Arthur Osbourne's farm at Foulden and he tried one out on Single's farm at Foulden Estate in the early 1920's". Harry Single's top quality draught horses were renowned.

"Cotton Kings" handled the cutting away operation in the later 1920's and 1930's. These were wheeled implements, pole hitched to two horses. Twin disc assemblies, one cutting each side of the cane row, performed in one pass the job the swing plough required two for.

The "scuffler" was the main implement used in the developing crop, but spring tyne cultivators were available by 1910. George Wright remembers James Christie sending out from Marsh and Webster to his Back River Estate farm a Massey Harris spring tyne cultivator in 1912–13, at the same time as the Stirling planter had its trial. Wright recalls: "They decided to give the cultivator a good test. It was pulled by two horses on a pole. With the tynes fixed against a tramline the horses were edged forward. The tynes straightened a bit and then suddenly let go, projecting the implement into the air with enough propulsion to allow it to jump the line".

Mechanical devices for applying fertilisers were common before the turn of the century. In 1910 C.J. Anderson of Marian was advertising one not substantially different from types used in the early 1940's. Vibrator types had a run and did not finally disappear until the mid 1940's but their mechanism was highly vulnerable to



McCormick Deering tractor of 1920's and 30's, with Bauple plough. Photo: Mackay "Canegrower Weekly".

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corrosion. "Butterfly" type feeds survived into the 1950's after which augur type delivery became almost universal.

International Harvester equipment distributed by J. Michelmore and Co. has had historically the longest run in Mackay district, handled by the same distributor. The firm handled McCormick Deering tractors between 1923 and 1942. I.H.C. tractors were sold in Mackay in 1922. The F20 Model was popular. It had the same engine as the Model 43 four cylinder International truck. In the early 1920's and for most of the pre-World War II years, Sunshine and Massey Harris implements were popular. "Cork" and "Blue" Model Fordson tractors tended to be regarded as pioneers among tractors as Model T and Model A Fords were among trucks.

A variety of disc ploughs appeared. Cantons and Secretarys were early models, the latter having been recommended by the C.S.R. Company. Empire and Avery ploughs were used at the same time — the latter sold with a wooden beam. By 1915–16 the six horse Sunshine double disc plough appeared. It was handled by Williams Agencies. The Suntop single disc plough was a heavy unit pulled by four horses abreast on a special bar. Suntops were also sold with a long beam to take two discs if necessary. Sanders (pronounced Saunders) horse drawn disc ploughs were popular.

Francis Dunne and Sons developed the Dunson plough at their Dunson Works at the southern end of Wood Street. Athens and Bauple ploughs were also attached to

Horses of the thirties. George Wright drilling out with a swing plough. Photo: George Wright.



tractors. Before the days of hydraulics the ploughs were controlled by spring loaded levers not always easy to operate. If pressure came on at the wrong time, they packed a "kick like a mule" reminiscent of the kick Jim McCready recalled of the engagement lever of Palmyra's five-roller mill. A wide range of Bauple machinery was handled by Fred Harris and Co. of Nebo Road.

At Mt. Pelion on the North Coast, brothers Jack and Louis Senini designed their own tractor mounted plough with more strength than others they had used and with an improved disc cut. They marketed it in 1936–37 under the patent name Samson but it is best remembered as the Senini plough.

An early century farm yard would have had at least eight or nine good draught horses, a couple of saddle horses and up to 15 head of cattle, probably six milking, a few fowls and perhaps a pig sty.

Most farms had a spring cart. There was at least one horse dray and occasionally a German waggon. Sulkies came later. A "buggy and pair" was a sign of some affluence and the appointments on the buggy and the grooming and harness of the horses an indicator of social standing. Mrs. Robert Martin's buggy was recalled as a fine vehicle, sometimes driven by Mrs. Martin herself, elegantly dressed for town in veil and long gloves. One old resident said: "Someone else may have seemed out of place on a dusty bush road but not Mrs. Martin. She dominated the scene".

E.M. Long's buggy and pair was regarded as one of the classiest in the district. His matched pairs were outstanding and he kept a good stable of mules for carriage work. The McDermott family would travel from St. Helens to Mirani, via Royston, in their buggy and pair and then catch the train to Mackay. Buggies and sulkies used for ''family'' travel were usually accorded special accommodation in the ''buggy house'' among the farm buildings.



Steel tyred Willman truck waggon of pre-1916 vintage drawn by up to six horses. Used by George Wright at Pioneer. It was fitted with rubber tyres in 1942 and was still in service in 1970. Photo: Mervyn Wright.

On the Wright farm at Pioneer Estate, a table top cane waggon had been in service for several years when Harry Wright arrived in 1915. It is still there (in 1983) much renovated. A 1916 iron tyred Willman truck waggon for hauling cane, was shod with rubber in 1942. George Wright says "Ray Bowman changed to rubber in 1941. We were among the first to change".

Rubber tyres allowed horse teams to be reduced from six to three. The Wright's waggon was used until they changed to mechanical harvesting in 1968. The waggon saw service for another three seasons on the neighbouring farm of Carl Rasmussen.

H. Mann of Pinnacle and N.P. Willman made waggons. They had a serious dispute over design patents. A sturdy four wheeled table top tip waggon was advertised by L. Mezgar of Walkerston in 1910.

Greater haulage distances on the North Coast saw motor lorries in more common use than at Farleigh. Model T Fords were used but heavier bodied models such as Chevrolets, Willys, Bedfords, Morris Commercials and Commers, soon were more popular. Single rear tyres on one ton and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ton models soon gave way to duals on two ton and heavier models. A hard tyred Vulcan was used by the McDermott's at Kolijo. The lorry was bought from Williams Agencies in 1926 and carted cane for eight seasons. Bill Fenner of Cameron's Pocket had a hard tyred Manchester and Ned Burdon of Pindi Pindi a hard tyred International. The Seninis at Mt Pelion had a hard tyred Republic. Mr. Louis Senini says it was an American three ton model with 12 in. rear tyres and 5 in. in front. It was still used during World War II but the Senini family had bought more up to date lorries by then. He did not recall that it needed many spare parts but a mechanic named Hudson at Mackay gave it an engine overhaul.

Motor cars became fairly common after 1922 although many farmers who were considered reasonably "well off" did not own one until the mid to late thirties. Many, particularly on the North Coast where the cane lorry was available for transport, did without a car until after World War II.

M. O'Loughlin began a Farleigh-Mackay passenger coach service about 1901. The fare to town was said to have been a florin (two shillings) single and four shillings return, which rose to a "dollar" (vernacular for five shillings in those days) for a passenger requiring a detour to be dropped off. In 1914 W.T. Bagnall of Mackay advertised a 20 h.p. Ford single seater for £190 (nearly two years of a farm worker's wages) and a tourer for £210. Mackay's first motor garage was opened by M. Cavell and A.B. Milne (maker of the planter) in March 1914.

## Part thirty-nine

# "TUDORSCLEROSIS" AND OTHER ILLS

#### **Costs and Prices**

In 1913 the Queensland Parliament passed three Acts which would dispense with the Federal intervention in sugar affairs provided for by the Sugar Bounty Act and the Excise Tariff Act of 1905. That is to say, legislatively, the transition from black labour was considered complete by the end of 1912.

The Sugar Cultivation Act of 1913 saw to the implementation of the White Australia policy in the canefields. It complemented the Federal Government's Immigration Restriction Act. The Sugar Growers' Act of 1913 provided for prompt interim cane payments, initially of about nine shillings a ton. These became an important feature of Farleigh growers' budgeting, and of growers everywhere. McGown had always recognised the need for this liquidity. His policy of letting mill store accounts run on to a generous degree was based in part on the hope that this type of credit would encourage larger crops.

The State had arranged with the Commonwealth to pass the Sugar Growers' Act and establish State "bounty" payments. Then the Commonwealth would abolish Excise and Bounty legislation; but there was an administrative hitch and farmers felt that when the new season's harvest began they would be "caught short" by not getting a promised 2/2d. a ton, on abolition of bounty.<sup>2</sup>

McGown subsequently received credit for recognition of growers' needs which probably should have been shared with his fellow millers. As Mackay Sugar Manufacturers' chairman he wired Premier Digby Denham that while the doubt on the bounty transfer existed the mills would pay the growers two shillings a ton, "or the equivalent of the full bounty, irrespective of whether the growers are indebted to the mills for advances or not". 3

From this confusion and from McGown's Farleigh policy a seed of expectation for a maximum interim payment at Farleigh was planted, the fruits of which have been enjoyed by Farleigh growers ever since.

The other 1913 Act, the Sugar Growers' Employment Act was virtually bridging legislation to allow industrial conditions formerly insisted on by the Commonwealth as part of its "bounty bargain", to be transferred into the ambit of the State Industrial Peace Act. These conditions pushed up farm costs in the same way as the 1911 strike settlement had done. This in turn lent validity to claims for legislation which would in Philip Kirwan's words, "give a fair deal for the farmer, the worker and the miller".

Another severe jolt had come in August 1912 with a new set of minimum wages and conditions announced by the Federal Minister for Trade and Customs (Mr. Frank

Tudor). The former minimum of 22/6d. and 25/- per week respectively for 58 and 60 hours, respectively in slack and harvest seasons, was increased to 36/- a week with keep and 48/- a week without keep. Hours were reduced to 48.

The percentages were staggering and the rises came on the heels of a Federal Royal Commission that year (headed in the beginning by Sir John Gordon and later by Mr. W.J. Brown) before which growers had sought to establish that they were making a bare living under post 1911 conditions. Indeed, before the end of the 1912 season, which was very dry, women were seen cutting cane on the North Side.<sup>4</sup>

Late in 1914, in urging a prices conference with millers, Philip Kirwan declared that growing cane under present conditions was "only a tucker job and not a very good one at that".

(One of the Federal Commissioners had been Philip Kirwan's barrister-canegrower colleague on the North Side, M.R.M. Shannon, until he resigned to contest the N.S.W. seat of North Sydney for the Labor Party.)

The Tudor provisions were labelled "Tudor's Bombshell" by the *Australian Sugar Journal*. It dubbed the minister a "political highwayman" and headed another article, "Tudorsclerosis Hits the Sugar Industry". Inexorably, the Sugar Growers' Employment Act, passed next year, recognised the Tudor wages and hours.

Andrew Fisher was then Labor Prime Minister. The 1911 action of his External Affairs minister in refusing to sanction requests for importation of new labourers and now this one by Tudor, sorely tried the basic "labor" sympathies of some of Farleigh's new yeoman farmers and led many of them to look favourably on current efforts being made to form a farmers' political party.

A series of grower-miller conferences between 1912 and 1914 sought to come to grips with some of the problems involved in arriving at just cane prices. McGown strove hard for a fair basis knowing the productivity limits of his own lands and the struggle he was having to make his enterprise pay. He was the unanimous choice for chairman at one significant conference in mid-1913 but he accepted reluctantly. The precise reasons for this reluctance are not known although he realised that the peculiar "Farleigh" stamp of his grower-miller policy may not have been applicable elsewhere.

McGown's standing was high. Philip Kirwan wrote in September 1912: "Except in regards price of cane (which he regarded as a general issue and not a domestic or personal one), Farleigh plays as fair with its suppliers as any mill in the district".

Since 1907 the Australian Sugar Producers' Association, regarded circumspectly as a millers' body by many growers, had been aspiring to be the single policy voice of the industry. In 1908 it had won affiliation with the P.R.F.G.A. McGown encouraged the marriage but by 1912 miller-grower pressures were mounting. Farleigh's J.T. O'Riordan was then P.R.F.G.A. president. He had great trust in McGown and he tried hard to keep the two organisations together. To the disappointment of both, disaffiliation came.

O'Riordan then had to turn to protect his membership from incursion by the Bundaberg based Cane Growers' Union of Australia, which because of its "labor" orientation was so attractive to Philip Kirwan and his "radical" Mackay colleagues. Against this background of miller-grower tensions and grower politics, much of which involved efforts to take a stern line on cane quality and prices, a chairman of a cane prices conference needed to be veritable Solomon. The mid-1913 meeting was harmonious. The millers were present as individuals, not as Manufacturers'

Association members. It centred on ways of growing better canes and on the agreed principle that better canes would earn better prices.

Suggestions for cane prices boards had been a hot industry and State political topic for more than two years. Inevitably the subject cropped up. McGown did not oppose the concept but he had doubts of how the system would work. The grower attendance grew wary when the A and B payment schemes of the C.S.R. Company at Homebush were discussed. Old suspicions of sliding scales died hard and many growers saw themselves being permanently disadvantaged if the mills were allowed to set the norms of payment. Nevertheless T.A. Powell, now a vigorous voice in grower affairs, McGown at Farleigh and J.C. Penny at Pleystowe, all looked favourably on the Homebush B scheme.<sup>6</sup>

Many growers were in a dilemma at such conferences, similar to Philip Kirwan's dilemma of 1911. With the exception of most C.G.U.A. members, and with recent industrial decisions in mind, they were suspicious of bureaucratic control, particularly if it involved Tudor style Labor policy.

McGown had shown great restraint in accepting low quality cane. Some days up to nine tenths of his supplies were of poor quality. This contributed to his offer of 13/- a ton for the 1914 season being up to 1/6d. a ton below the price being offered by other district mills. The growers rejected the offer.<sup>7</sup>

Palms growers had already decided to strike when 70 of their 90 growers, by a majority of two, rejected the company's offer. Farleigh growers however did not decide to withhold supplies and the next move was up to McGown. He is believed to have been ready to compromise, but not immediately. The next day he announced he would be harsh on low quality cane.

A further meeting decided by two votes to start "under protest". Racecourse was offering 14/6d. a ton. Philip Kirwan suggested a compromise 14/- "without prejudice" until mass meetings at Palms, Farleigh and Racecourse were held. McGown then outlined his compromise. Growers' representatives would be allowed to supervise cane quality. The mill would make available, at the end of the season, details of sugar manufactured and any profits attributable to improved cane quality would be returned to the growers. Mill books could be inspected weekly to measure cane received against sugar made and growers could examine records of Farleigh sugar sales to the C.S.R. Company at the end of the season if they wished.

The plan was an incentive for efficient crop production. Hitherto there had been no incentive to encourage high quality canes in the way there had been at Homebush and Plane Creek. A growers' executive was formed to handle their participation, with W.B. Fordyce chairman and D. Cameron secretary. J. Delahunty was appointed to watch the growers' interests at the mill.

These meetings were marked by vigorous debate but it is typical of James McGown's style that he would remain behind afterwards and "kick around" in an informal manner, matters discussed at meetings. In one such conversation he opposed the practice of growers taking small samples of juice to the Sugar Experiment Station for testing. Small samples, he argued, could deteriorate quickly and preclude accurate testing.

Edward Denman, always ready to take a hard line against a miller if he felt justice warranted it, agreed and in view of his earlier practical experience in sugar making, his

agreement carried weight. The practice prevailed and was to lead Farleigh into one of its celebrated pieces of litigation involving cane prices.

The *Mercury* and the bulk of Farleigh growers hailed McGown's plan as an advance in the concept of co-operative production. The scheme could not improve the quality of cane already grown but it produced an immediate improvement in the care taken in cleaning extraneous matter during cutting and loading. On October 27th the *Mercury's* Farleigh correspondent reported that the farmers had taken action against some of their own members for supplying poor quality cane.

James McGown's compromise and his Farleigh growers' common sense however could not stop the march of events which would make cane prices regulated by law.

## Legislation and Litigation

E.B. Swayne had urged some kind of cane prices regulation as early as 1902. Philip Kirwan had been pushing his "fair go" concept at least since the Pleystowe inquiry of 1902 and he had discoursed at length with his old friend M.R.M. Shannon on the matter. Since Shannon was a Commissioner on the Gordon Royal Commission in 1912 there is no doubt these discussions helped formulate a recommendation coming from that enquiry, that cane prices be regulated by legislation.

Kirwan visualised prices boards operating in a manner similar to wages boards which had been established in 1908. He despaired of getting agreement from the millers and when the P.R.F.G.A. affiliated with the A.S.P.A. in 1909, he despaired of getting any official agreement from the body politic of his local farmer colleagues.

He went to Bundaberg when the Cane Growers' Union of Australia was being formed and thought he saw a way. C.G.U.A. men were not averse to compulsory regulation and regarded the A.S.P.A. as a miller dominated body. The Labor Party policy for regulating rural affairs seemed the best way of circumventing the objections of millers and a conservative Government.

The following discussion occurred when James McGown led the Manufacturers and P.R.F.G.A. in a conference with Premier Denham on 30th April 1913 on price proposals.

Premier: What gave rise to the question of cane price boards?

Mr. J. McDonald (Racecourse): I don't know. We have always given the best price we could.

Mr. McGown: It came from the (1912 Federal) Royal Commission.

Premier: No it was suggested before that. It emanated from this town.

Mr. McDonald: I think Mr. Kirwan suggested it.

During the 1915 State election campaign Kirwan specifically claimed he had first introduced the idea of cane prices boards in the 1912 election (in which he unsuccessfully stood against E.B. Swayne). He wrote: "Some time in June 1912 a meeting of farmers was held in the Oddfellows Hall to protest against the way the millers were treating the farmers in the matter of price of cane. I moved and C.C. Rasmussen seconded a motion in favour of cane price boards, which motion was carried with about one dissentient in a full and representative meeting. Copies of the resolution were forwarded to the members for Mackay and Mirani and to the Premier and Leader of the Opposition (and) . . . . . to Colonel Rankin as leader of the supposed Country Party".



Philip Kirwan — Indefatiguable advocate of regulation of sugar industry affairs for half a century.

Colonel C.D. Rankin (Burrum), E.B. Swayne (Mirani) and E.J. Caine (Bowen) introduced a private members' bill in 1914. The bill was passed with Labor Party support but never reached the Legislative Council. Kirwan claimed: "Rankin, Swayne and three or four others killed it by voting for an adjournment of the debate when they could have saved it by voting with the Labor Party and carrying it into committee".8

He added that Rankin soon afterwards became a minister (Railways) and would no longer oppose the Government. He wrote: "It was distinctly our bill, in that it was a special meeting convened by the P.R.F.G.A. which asked for its introduction". Some of the farmers in Burrum electorate who urged Rankin to introduce such a bill might have made a similar claim. The idea of boards had received a wide airing in Bundaberg. Whether Kirwan crystallised the concept in the minds of his southern colleagues or vice versa, probably never will be established. Those who remember Kirwan's style would probably give him the credit.

The Regulation of Cane Prices Act, containing 22 sections and setting up the Central Sugar Cane Prices Board was passed in October 1915 by the Ryan Labor Government which had swept to power in May. In August 1915, T.A. Powell, then on the threshold of an illustrious career in sugar affairs, had remarked at a local conference: "To my mind this Board will practically control the sugar industry in Queensland". None would disagree that he was right.

Many farmers would have continued willing to negotiate with the Company particularly with the trusted Andrew Gibson as farmers' representative at the mill; but T.A. Powell and Philip Kirwan were determined that the Cane Prices Act would be the arbiter of miller-grower agreements. Indeed a wide range of individual agreements were now illegal under the Act. In the next few years miller-grower contention was

intensive. T.A. Powell was president of the United Cane Growers' Association, proclaiming itself the voice of all the growers and was often in vigorous public disagreement with the A.S.P.A. and its formidable secretary G.H. Pritchard.

From 1916 to 1919 growers in dispute with mills had their legal expenses met from a "Cane Prices Board fund". Mills had to meet their own costs. Farleigh's costs in extensive litigation with Powell, Kirwan and Rudolph Boese were very high but the lasting effect was in the extra cane price, Farleigh eventually had to pay.

Grey areas in the legislation soon became apparent. In 1916 Farleigh claimed inability to perform individual growers' cane analyses and farmers were paid on the average of a group analysis, the "group" comprising the whole mill area. T.A. Powell objected that he was disadvantaged as he supplied cane sweeter than the group average and supported his claim with tests done at the Sugar Experiment Station — a procedure James McGown, backed by Edward Denman, had earlier declared did not give a fair test.

The 1917 Local Cane Prices Board award provided that growers in Powell's position growing over 1,000 tons of cane could receive individual analysis. The withdrawal of "sweet" farms from the "group" had the effect of lowering the average sugar content of the rest of the cane. The Company claimed this should lower the price paid to the rest of the growers.

The Company took the view that prior to the time Powell had opted out of the "group analysis" he was included in a "group" in the terms of the current Local Cane Prices award and on one delivery of 282 tons, they paid him accordingly. He claimed individual payment, which was higher. He claimed he had a right to withdraw from the group. On 21st December 1917 he proceeded by complaint in the Police Court to determine the question. The Court found he was not a member of the group and Farleigh was fined £100 with £6/19/1d. costs for breach of the award. The Company lodged an appeal.

About a fortnight later, on 8th January 1918, Philip Kirwan won a Magistrate's Court judgment against the Company for their failure to crush 5 tons 11 cwt. of standover having alleged that it had a sugar content of less than 7 c.c.s., the minimum on which a miller had to pay. Kirwan and Powell took samples of this cane to the Experiment Station for testing and three tests registered above 7 c.c.s. The Company was fined £50.

The issue was particularly significant in 1917 for much standover was delivered following the 1916 Dickson Award farmers' strike. The decision in favour of Kirwan could well have opened the way for farmers to supply, in any season, large quantities of "unmarketable" cane which, provided it contained some which tested above 7 c.c.s., would have to be paid for.

Farleigh appealed to the Full Court which quashed the conviction, ordered restitution of the fine and costs against Kirwan. It was held that the Company was entitled to reject the cane under the Sale of Goods Act. Kirwan was granted leave to appeal. He maintained that the section of the Act governing delivery of and payment for cane was complied with, "if the sugar cane supplied averages above 7 c.c.s. although portion of it contains less". The Company's fears were heightened. The net result of these actions plus the inevitable introduction of individual analysis, would be to make cane supplies more costly.

Large amounts of standover had played havoe with factory work and at the end of 1917 Farleigh sought to have the price of that year's cane reduced by 3/- a ton. The Central Sugar Cane Prices Board did not grant the application but allowed Farleigh to peg its payments to an interim amount and gave the Company the option of making another application. Cyclone damage delayed preparation of the case until after the 1917 award had expired. Farleigh withheld 3/- a ton from mill pays but did not reapply for a reduction until 4th June 1918, by which time the 1917 award had expired.

T.A. Powell contended the Central Board had no jurisdiction because the award had expired. The Board believed likewise and dismissed the application. Farleigh took the matter to the Full Court which declared the Central Board did have jurisdiction.

While Farleigh was refusing to pay the 3/- the High Court decided for Powell in his claim for individual payment for his 283 tons.

The question then arose, should the growers paid on group analysis be paid on the overall "group" 12.01 c.c.s. which included sugar of Powell's sweeter cane, or be paid on the lesser amount of 11.96 c.c.s. applicable if Powell's were deleted. Powell sought advice from the Crown Solicitor. One course was to sue the Company for award breach, which would involve extensive litigation. The other was to sue the Company in the Petty Debts Court for an amount under £50. The growers understood from reading the advice of the Crown Solicitor that there would be no appeal from a Petty Debts Court decision.

Rudolph Boese, at whose blacksmith's shop so many farmers' cases against the Company had been hatched, volunteered to sue, claimed the greater amount, and recovered £33/15/8d. from the Company. Then the growers received their first shock. Contrary to their understanding of the Crown Solicitor's advice, Farleigh was able to appeal to the District Court. It found substantially for Boese. Farleigh appealed to the Full Court which found that Farleigh should have paid a lower amount of £31/1/4d.

High Court litigation threw a new, and to the Farleigh Company, worrying light on the legal interpretation of what was meant by sugar content, when it emerged that the growers were probably entitled to a higher c.c.s. even than they were claiming. This whole tangle of litigation, in Philip Kirwan's calculation, won growers an extra 3/- a ton for their cane but then the farmers received their next shock. Costs were awarded against Boese and the Government finally called a halt to paying growers' costs in such litigation.

Rudolph Boese was a heavy loser. He believed, as did his grower colleagues, that he had been encouraged by the Crown Law Office to defend the appeals. A special fund was established to help meet his costs — since he had agreed in the first place only to provide a test case.

Opinions had been hardening in various quarters, that Government funding of growers' legal actions could not continue. Thoughtful millers were beginning to believe that if they had to live with the Cane Prices Act it was better to leave final decisions with the Central Board, which at least contained a millers' representative. A significant step along this road had been taken in the Powell–Farleigh disputes, when the Full Court in August 1918 held that the Central Board did have jurisdiction to hear Farleigh's price reduction application. Referral back to the Central Board did not help Farleigh much, for the Company did not get its price reduction, but the incident helped reinforce a growing belief in Government circles, in sugar circles, and it was believed in Crown Law circles, that cane prices and related matters should be the exclusive

province of the Central Sugar Cane Prices Board. In latter days consideration simply of cane prices provides a relatively small proportion of the Board's work.

Popular belief in the canefields reflected a cynical view of Queensland politics. The Labor Government, so ran a strong conventional argument, had lost a substantial farmer vote in the 1918 elections and saw little political mileage in supporting the farmers against the mills. Philip Kirwan was greatly disenchanted and his views at that time carried political weight. He said: "There is no question the Government had the power to pay (Boese's costs) and they should have paid. One does not doubt the word of a friend — or a supposed friend".

## Part forty

# STORM AND TEMPEST

It is necessary now to backtrack a little to pre-Cane Prices Act days. In 1914, while that legislation was still several debates off enactment, the upheaval in the pattern of distribution of sugar industry monies progressed a further step with the introduction of the McNaughton Award. This provided for a minimum wage of 9/2d. a day for unskilled labour. In retrospect it seems little enough but in the context of the period it represented a large increase.

Of great significance was the principle embodied in the McNaughton decision that an award had to be abided by, irrespective of the capacity of a particular employer to pay. Two representative comments indicate the impact this had on the question of cane prices.

<sup>1.</sup> The sequence of the early century legislation is concisely set out by H.T. Easterby Q.S.I. Parts two and three. Informative comment D.M. 26-6-1913.

<sup>2.</sup> A.S.J. Vol 4 September and October 1913. D.M. Leaders 25-3-1913 and 22-4-1913.

<sup>3.</sup> A.S.J. Vol 4 June 1913 p 138.

<sup>4.</sup> D.M. 11-10-1912.

<sup>5.</sup> A.S.J. Vol 3 September 1912 p 397.

<sup>6.</sup> D.M. 16-5-1913. See Appendix for Homebush A and B Schemes.

<sup>7.</sup> D.M. 23-7-1914.

<sup>8.</sup> D.M. 30–11–1915; Labour leader T.J. Ryan offered to continue through the night to allow the bill to pass but the Government declined the offer.

<sup>9.</sup> D.M. 17-8-1915.

P. Kirwan: "If cane prices are fair, the wage could be paid".

Mercury: "The award has introduced a new element into the question of prices". The P.R.F.G.A. put a price proposition to the millers in June 1914 but it was rejected. James McGown said he would prefer to deal with his own growers.

Nevertheless, just over a month later his growers rejected a proposal to pay on the C.S.R. B scheme, based on 13 shillings a ton.<sup>3</sup>

Skirmishing of this kind continued until the passage of the Cane Prices Act and as has been shown it then intensified sharply before it subsided.

In the early part of 1915 the A.W.U. prepared a stiff log of claims which included what the *Melbourne Age* later termed "extraordinary conditions". Part of the hearing took place at Mackay in May before acting Judge Dickson, a young man recently appointed, who had a limited amount of industrial experience.

Before the impact of the resultant Dickson Award is related it is appropriate to show by sets of figures, aspects of Farleigh's economy and how it compared to general district standards.

Plane Creek	42 miles	Homebush	29 miles
Marian	36½ miles	North Eton	26 miles
Farleigh	36 miles	Palms	7 miles
Pleystowe	33½ miles	Racecourse	5 miles

#### Crushing figures

		0 0		
1912			1913	
Mill	tons sugar	Mill	tons cane	tons sugar
Cattle Creek	1,150	Cattle Creek	44,875	4,487
North Eton	1,500	Farleigh	63,972	7,000
Farleigh	1,950	Homebush	56,000	7,000
Pleystowe	1,900	Marian	54,000	6,200
Palms	2,200	Meadowlands	31,800	3,440
Marian	2,300	North Eton	40,000	4,300
Racecourse	3,150	Pleystowe	58,043	6,183
Plane Creek	3,200	Plane Creek	62,000	7,300
Homebush	3,500	Palms	40,800	5,500
		Racecourse	35,000	4,117

It can be seen that the mill area was one of small growers.

Crop Size	No. of Growers	Crop Size	No. of Growers
Up to 100 tons	64	600- 700	2
100-200	46	700- 800	4
200-300	20	800- 900	2
300-400	17	900-1,000	Nil
400-500	8	1,000-1,100	1
500-600	6	1,310	1
		1,666	1

Grower Numbers		Tons Cane Crushed	
Date	Total	Date	Total
1909	124	1907	42,296
1901	134	1908	30,276
1911	150	1909	38,619
1912	156	1910	57,701
1913	158	1911	42,855
1914	162	1912	17,582
1915	168	1913	63,972
1916	160	1914	42,016
		1915	38,684

The 1912 figures reflect the disastrous result of the 1911 strike.

Tons crushed include Farleigh Estate crops as well as farmers'. In 1910 the estate crop was 13,748 tons, but after that the land was sold to farmers.

Mill capacity in 1916 was 80,000 tons.

James McGown forecast sharp production drops if the claims were won and gave as the reason for the low tonnage in 1915 the fact that many farmers had discharged labour and were working only with family help. He told the Mackay hearing, before Acting Judge Dickson that, Farleigh worked two 11 hour shifts and would work three shifts if there were sufficient cane and adequate labour. The 1915 crop had been handled in 14 weeks.

The union case was well researched but it came up with some statistical oddities. One man claimed he walked 44 miles a day attending Farleigh's triple effets. To have done so, allowing for pauses to turn round and for pauses to attend his duties he would have looked like a speeded-up version of an early silent movie.

The assertion however highlighted a peculiarity of this mill station at Farleigh. A normal number of pots was four but Farleigh had 10, divided into three sets, only two of which worked except under unusual circumstances.

McGown said the mill store made a small profit and the bakery, which supplied the district as well as the staff, made a profit of £9 in 1915.

When the details of the Dickson Award were announced in August 1916 they stunned the sugar people and even bemused some A.W.U. men. Acting Judge Dickson awarded more than the union sought in what, even at the beginning, A.W.U. people tended to regard as, to use a modern term, an ambit claim.

The effect of the award was to add three shillings a ton to the cost of producing cane and £1 a ton to the cost of milling. Wages increased by more than a third and an increase of two shillings a ton in the cane cutting rate virtually took from growers the cane price advantage they had gained by the Cane Prices Act.<sup>4</sup>

Acting Judge Dickson found that farmers were more securely placed than at the time of the McNaughton award. (The Cane Prices legislation had become law in the meantime.)

Two thirds of Mackay district farmers came to town for a mass meeting, which was chaired by W. Kindness. They decided that "owing to the impossible and ruinous nature" of the award they would stop harvesting until the Crown intervened to abolish it; and they extended their options with a further decision in which they pledged

individually to stop harvesting until "we receive a price for our product commensurate with the increase in wages".

An action committee was formed: T. Hodgett (Cattle Creek), H. Hawkins (Farleigh), R.H. McKee (Plane Creek), J. McKay (Palms), J. McDonald (Racecourse), C. Brown (Pleystowe), W. Jackson (North Eton), W. Pratt (Marian), F.J. Stevens (Homebush). The strike lasted through September and into mid-October, when a special farmers' committee recommended resumption. Farleigh representative and also chairman of a special Farleigh committee was H.E. Hawkins.

The strike grievously hurt Farleigh shareholders. It grievously hurt many farmers. Its effect was not quickly seen on the district economy because many farm families were accustomed to living off the product of their labours with a minimum of cash income.

The effect on the labour force was beneficial but not uniformly good. More than half a century later people recalled that their fathers persevered with family labour and a minimum of hired help until well into the 1920's, in the belief they could not afford to employ men.

District standover that year totalled 131,000 tons of cane. Farleigh topped the list with a figure approaching half its crop; only North Eton left none. Farleigh left 25,000 tons, Marian 23,000, Racecourse 20,000, Cattle Creek 17,000, Pleystowe 15,000, Plane Creek 12,000, Palms 12,000 and Homebush 7,000. In that list the C.S.R. Company which at Homebush was soon to bear, with Farleigh, the full blast of grower militancy, served its growers best by leaving least cane.

On an average price of 25/- a ton for cane the farmers lost £163,000 and the mills £311,000. Oddly again, Farleigh which was soon to be seen as a villain in the cane prices story, paid its growers more than the average price, with  $25/10\frac{1}{2}$ d.

The A.S.P.A. appealed to the High Court but before this was resolved the Ryan Government in Queensland invalidated the award by discarding the Industrial Peace Act under which it had been declared. A replacement award was required. The task fell to Mr. T.W. McCawley recently appointed to the Supreme Court and president of the Industrial Court. Contrary to forebodings of major sugar industry employers, he softened the situation considerably with a new award in May 1917.

Wages were still a relatively high 12 shillings a day but many of the other conditions were modified. Some unionists saw this as a sellout and threatened to strike. E.G. Theodore, then Acting Premier, who had shown such fine judgement for the workers in the 1911 strike, urged acceptance and his advice was taken. Queensland rural workers had much for which to thank "Red Ted" Theodore but for another 50 years some old militants would assert that he let them down in 1917.

The sugar industry had been seriously disadvantaged by an adverse train of events when the Commonwealth fixed the wartime sugar price in 1915. When food boards were established at the outbreak of the war, the price for sugar was lower than it had been for some years, largely because of a glut in Java. The C.S.R. Company had been obliged to reduce its price to the consumer to prevent cheaper black grown sugar flooding the market.

Not long afterwards the Australian price became standardised and then officially fixed at an abnormally low rate. Then the open market went up as high as £40 a ton and Australian producers were unable to reap the benefit.

Judge McCawley's award was made more acceptable by an offer of the

Commonwealth to increase the price of sugar from £18 to £21 a ton although the Ryan Government was still arguing over details at the time the McCawley award was announced.

Thus at the end of 1917, when James McGown decided to retire, Farleigh shareholders could have felt that some chance for stability and profitability lay ahead.

The McGowns had decided to remain in the district and were given a warm farewell from the mill early in January 1918.<sup>5</sup>

Old-timers recall that in spite of the business tensions, Farleigh then was a happy community. The mill maintained special contact throughout the district with tramway deliveries of bread, groceries and produce. Store credits continued to be generous and there were numerous facilities for social activity.

H.W.J. Gunning wrote: "Entertainment was catered for with a nice hall and a very fast floor and a stage. There was a good library, courts and sports ovals for tennis and football". Mrs. Bob Gibson has recalled that the floor was dressed for dancing by dragging weighted sugar or chaff bags across it.

She was a popular pianist. George Wright says: "We would urge her to speed up the tempo of some of the vigorous old time dances and away she would go. The dancers would accept the challenge to stay in time until finally the last stayers would retire exhausted, to the cheers of the onlookers".

Bert Jackson who had been at Farleigh for more than 50 years when he retired as assistant secretary and accountant in 1975, recalled a few years on in similar vein.

A circular shrubbery of guava bushes grew up just outside the mill office, which was a wooden double storey building. (It was later shifted to a different site close by and used as staff quarters until it was demolished in 1980.) Here were held many games of two-up and many fist fights — no gloves — sometimes for fun and sometimes to settle a score. "I remember Len Garner doing a hand stand on top of the stack", Bert has recalled. Then there was Tom McCormack. He had a very hairy chest and a pet cat. He would doze off with the cat on the thatch of his chest. One of his mates once let a dog into the quarters and skin and hair became more than a figure of speech.

James McGown was not in retirement for long. As though the business storms and the heightening drama of the Powell, Kirwan and Boese cases were not enough, the elements took a hand. On 20th and 21st January 1918 one of the nation's more celebrated cyclones struck Mackay district and killed 22 people. James McGown was commissioned to assess Farleigh damage, which was severe.

Farleigh House was badly damaged.

A large section of the mill stack collapsed, causing further serious damage from the fall.

The sugar shed roof disappeared completely and the carrier shed lost its roof.

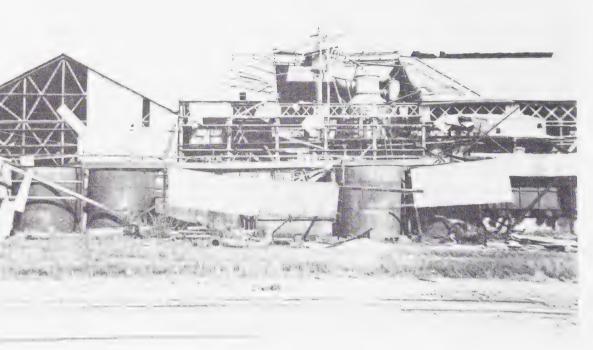
The roof over the boilers collapsed and the rest of the mill buildings were badly torn about.

Two of three sugar sheds in the mill yard and half the roof of the third were blown away; 1,500 tons of the 2,000 tons of sugar stored in them were lost.

Most other mill buildings were damaged though not as badly as Farleigh House.

Flood damage to tramways was severe.

Wm. Forgan Smith M.L.A. for Mackay, put Mackay district farmers' losses at £860,000. At Farleigh, T.A. Powell had expected 2,000 tons for 1918 on his Foulden farm. His post-cyclone estimate was 960 tons and he cut 540. Philip Kirwan's post



1918 cyclone damage — wrecked roof over jelly sugar shed, the end of the sugar room (left) and pans (right of damaged section). Photo: Colin McGown.

cyclone estimate was 500 tons reduced from an original 600 to 700 tons. He cut 129 tons.

The loss of tonnage in 1918 was in itself as grievous as it had been after the Dickson strike. Disney McGown, James McGown's son and the new manager, was faced with the by now impossible task of urging the growers to meet the company half way in the manner that had been mutually advantageous in the past. Times had changed. The Cane Prices Act clearly stated growers' rights. For Farleigh, survival meant adaption but for Farleigh shareholders adaption was difficult.

The Farleigh shareholders, who had invested profits back into the Company in generous measure, were beginning to wonder was it worth while. Fifty years later Mr. Garnet Buss's view of the period had not altered. "When the profit wasn't there", he said to this writer, "how could you pay the price?"

The year had one redeeming feature. The War was over. For the McGowns this meant that son Tom, who had survived Gallipoli, was safe. Many other Farleigh families were similarly thankful.

It was to be 10 months before the local boys were officially welcomed back. In the first week of September 1919 gold medals were presented by the local community to the main bunch of returned men. There were 19 of them (although others including H.G. "Chook" Mulherin had also survived): Major W. Koch, Lt. R. Denny, Cpl. Fletcher, Ptes. McGill, Johnson, and Singh, Lt. T. Mulherin, Sgt. F. Elworthy (M.M.), Sgt. G. Martin, Bdr. A. Williamson, Ptes. J. Halliday, W. Williams, G. Garner, J. Grendon, R. Birditt, E. Hill, W. Duncan, R. Friend and T. McGown.



1918 cyclone damage. Photo: Colin McGown.

H.W.J. Gunning has recalled staff members and key employees of 1919: D. McGown, manager; W. Christoe, secretary; Mr. Little, chief engineer; Tom Clarke and son Jack, sugar boilers; Mr. Wallace, head loco fitter; W. Denman, chief cane inspector; C. McGown, assistant cane inspector; J. Black, truck repairer; Disney Watt, mill yard boss; F. Burton, tramline ganger; Bob Gibson and Harry Pardoe, loco drivers; Ned Matsen, head rigger; Mr. Barratt, store; Jim Duncan, head stableman; S. Taylor, baker; Mrs. Wessal, officers' quarters overseer.

The mill had its own dairy herd and supplied staff. The Gentle Brothers delivered milk on their way to school. Willie Low Mine, delivered fresh vegetables to residents twice a week.8

<sup>1.</sup> D.M. 27-4, 6-5, 7-5, 12-5, 29-5-1914. A.S.J. is relied on heavily for the industrial story.

<sup>2.</sup> D.M. 17-6-1914.

<sup>3.</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>4.</sup> D.M. 23-8-1916.

<sup>5.</sup> D.M. 11-1-1918.

<sup>6.</sup> Gunning papers.

<sup>7.</sup> D.M. report.

<sup>8.</sup> Gunning papers.

## Part forty-one

# COUNTDOWN TO LIQUIDATION

## High Hopes

Farleigh's capital structure was upgraded in 1911. The 140 £500 shares were replaced with 70,000 £1 shares issued as paid up. The capital was increased to £150,000 by creation of 80,000 £1 shares, 50,000 of which were issued to Frederic Buss and John Cran as paid up. The company office shifted from Farleigh to Barolin Street, Bundaberg.<sup>1</sup>

Only two of the first seven crushing seasons returned good profits. Results (not allowing for interest on capital) were:

1905 — £4,964 profit.

1906 - £1,921 loss (5 per cent dividend of £3,500 declared).

1907 — £3,170 profit.

1908 — £3,414 loss (5 per cent dividend of £3,500 declared).

1909 — £3,277 profit.

1910 — £7,998 profit (10 per cent dividend of £7,000 declared).

1911 — Dividends of 15 per cent on £70,000 and 7½ per cent on £20,000 declared.

Cost of manufacture was £10/9/9d. a ton in 1906 and £7/17/6d. in 1910. Farm yields were very low as these average tons per acre indicate:

Year	White labour farms	Farleigh Estate
1906	14 t.p.a.	8.8 t.p.a.
1907	14.5	19.
1908	9	14
1909	11.8	11:7
1910	15.9	28.6

In the 1911 season the mill employed 63 white men, three boys and 23 coloured men.<sup>2</sup>

The post-strike year of 1912 was disastrous with only 17,582 tons crushed. The effects of this negated a reasonable 1913 result (63,972 tons crushed) and were still being absorbed in the 1914 and 1915 seasons. A holding operation against the Cane Prices Act occupied 1916 and 1917. The Dickson award strike reduced the crop in 1916 and meant 25,000 tons of standover had to be treated in 1917. A dividend declared in 1917 was to be the last in the Company's trading life.

The results of the next two seasons were beyond bearing and on 21st November 1919, growers were notified the company would close after that season. A company circular stated: "1918 and 1919 returned big losses, not due to any inefficiency in the mill. Cane prices were based on a 90% work coefficient and the mill had not been below that figure".

After heavy losses in 1918 the directors considered the 1919 Local Cane Prices Board Award would lead to another heavy loss. Before the start of the 1919 season and after the 1919 award was made, the mill was offered to the Government to work under the powers conferred by Section 20 of the Cane Prices Act. The mill was ready to crush but the offer was refused and the owners told they would have to abide by the award.

T.A. Powell (U.C.G.A. president) felt the Government might agree to a takeover but the Government had long since become disenchanted with sugar mill ownership — and it had an "out". The Minister for Agriculture told a Farleigh meeting, disregarding the Cane Prices Act provisions, that his only power of purchase was under the Co-operative Sugar Mills Act of 1914. This required that growers should put up one third of the price, which was beyond both the capacity and inclination of most Farleigh farmers.

The Farleigh U.C.G.A. branch appointed a committee to negotiate with Disney McGown: W.B. Fordyce, J.J. Hand, T.A. Powell, J. Thornton, P. Kirwan and S. Hamilton. J.T. O'Riordan (branch chairman) and A.P. Donnelly (secretary) were exofficio members. Powell outlined a scheme for Government operation involving issue to growers of cane credits which would provide 6/3d. a ton over 20 years. Kirwan concurred. James Croker (Farleigh's largest supplier) said the award price for cane was too high and favoured special arrangements with the Company. W.B. Fordyce and F. Knobel agreed.

W. Coakley urged support for the Company. He said they started him without capital and through their kindness and aid he was in a very sound position. J.T. O'Riordan said he had little faith in Government control and favoured an agreement with the Company to be ratified by the Central Sugar Cane Prices Board. Disney McGown reiterated, in a reply to A.P. Donnelly, that the company would not re-open but would consider a proposition from the growers.

James Croker moved, seconded by F.J.E. Holt, that growers accept what the Company could reasonably afford to pay with sugar at £21 a ton and authorise the committee to negotiate for a price down to 27/- a ton of 12 c.c.s. cane on the basis of a 40,000 ton crop. Philip Kirwan opposed this and seconded by J. Devine moved an amendment: "that the Government be asked to purchase the mill for the growers and that interest and redemption be a just charge against the cane crop". It was lost 54-53 on the casting vote of the chairman.

W.B. Fordyce and P. Dunworth moved that the suppliers accept, on a 40,000 tons crop basis, a base price of 28/- a ton for 12 c.c.s. cane with a rise and fall of one penny a ton for each 1,000 tons over or under 40,000 tons, on a sugar price of £21 a ton.

This was carried as an amendment to Croker's motion but Powell, Kirwan and Thornton, with several of their supporters, said they were no longer prepared to be associated with a grower decision and left the meeting. Their line was a tough one but consistent with Kirwan's oft stated proposition that grower security lay with the Cane Prices Act, not with negotiation with millers. Kirwan later declared the mill threat to close was bluff. As the motion, the amendment was carried almost unanimously, with Croker and Holt against. C. Denman, F. Knobel and M. Sexton replaced Powell, Thornton and Kirwan on the negotiating committee.

Later McGown said he thought 28/- too high and the penny per ton provision made it exceedingly so, but promised to put the proposal to his directors. Subsequent events, however, put a happier complexion on the argument.

All Mackay mills had problems in the 1919–20 financial year because the Australian price of £21 a ton was too low. Early in 1920 a Federal Royal Commission led by A.B. Piddington recommended a rise of £1 a ton which both the business community and the sugar industry declared to be outrageously insufficient.

The matter was discussed at a public meeting at Mackay and Philip Kirwan was deputed to put to Prime Minister W.M. Hughes, soon to visit the city, a case for a £9 increase — £3 each for miller, grower and worker. The A.S.P.A. which earlier had seemed likely to settle for £27 a ton, backed the £9 rise.

A report of the Commonwealth Joint Committee of public accounts supported the industry's stand and Hughes raised the price to £30/6/8d.; £4 of the increase went to the farmers and £5/6/8d. to the mills, with an agreed trade off on wages and conditions. Hughes let it be understood that he saw the price as incentive to produce. Domestic consumption had then outstripped supply and black grown Java sugar was costing up to £40 a ton to import.

The increase raised the price to six pence a pound in the shops but the industry never received the full amount. The retail price had been three pence when the raw sugar price was £18 in 1916. The price was later raised to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  pence when retail prices in Canada and Europe were 14 and 18 pence a pound. Australia produced less than home requirements. The Government placed an embargo on exports and high cost sugar was imported at a loss. The Government after 1920 recouped all its loss from the sixpence.

The Bundaberg directors decided to crush on but Disney McGown still had to contend with a mill starved for cane. Then the C.S.R. Company decided to close Homebush. The reasons were given in the 1921 half-yearly report: "The crop has nearly always been under the capacity of the mill and since the advent of the Cane Prices Board the activities of that body and a hostile minority of growers have made our work unprofitable".<sup>3</sup>

The C.S.R. Company had always encouraged improved farm husbandry and production of good quality cane. In this latter respect most other district mills had, at one time or another, lagged considerably.

The Company's stiff opposition to the original Cane Prices legislation and subsequent efforts to circumvent it, had led to its arranging with growers to sell their crops to a Sydney intermediary so as to take advantage of the "free trade among states" provisions of Section 92 of the Federal Constitution. At Homebush there had been five years of vigorous confrontation between the Company and its suppliers. Homebush had 123 suppliers in 1919. In December 1920 the management announced the 1921 season would be the last.

The mill had 29 miles of permanent tramway. Mill machinery, portable tramways and rollingstock were to be removed. The permanent lines were offered to Pioneer Shire Council for £20,000, payable as debentures over 20 years at 5 per cent provided the line was used to haul cane, but in March 1921 the Council rejected the offer.

Farleigh had advanced negotiations under way with Homebush growers in early February 1921. McGown wanted a firm agreement for supplies over several years. The growers appointed F.J. Stevens, H.R. Swanson and F.H. Stevens as a negotiating committee and they extended discussions to Plane Creek, North Eton, Pleystowe and Racecourse.

At the 1921 Racecourse annual meeting, David Pratt moved that the Racecourse company (then a central mill company) take up the offer rejected by Pioneer Shire

Council. Vigorous debate involving J.A. Michelmore (for the proposal) and James Croker (against) resulted in a decision to investigate a Homebush takeover. Seventy Homebush growers opted to go to Farleigh, under a long term agreement which was subsequently scheduled to end in 1930.<sup>4</sup>

Surprisingly, in view of earlier Homebush determination to stick to the provisions of the Cane Prices Act, the growers agreed to let Farleigh pay on group analysis instead of individual analysis of each grower's cane. The last cane was delivered to Homebush mill in driving rain on 6th January 1922. The final crop (71,721 tons) was the largest on record.

In spite of the tensions of the past four years, the standing of Farleigh management was still high among growers. William Coakley's comments at the 1919 "shut-down" meeting were a case in point. In reply to a remark by one of the members of the Piddington Commission in 1919, that mills no longer made advances to growers, Disney McGown said Farleigh's advances were at a record high.

Edward Denman was to write that in spite of strong disagreements he had had with successive Farleigh managements and in spite of an unfortunate stigma which attached to Farleigh from repudiation in London of some of Robert Walker's agreement years ago, he had found Farleigh the best mill to deal with in his experience.

Disney McGown now had his cane supply. Homebush cane was transferred to Government rail at Rosella. A Farleigh Dick Kerr locomotive was sent to the Rosella yards and the cane was transferred from tramway to railway by a travelling steam crane set on its own rails.

It was said heavy losses were incurred by cane falling off rail wagons en route to the mill. Large heaps certainly accumulated near the Pioneer River Bridge but the quantity lost was more spectacular than economically significant. Of more concern at Farleigh later on, was a concession Homebush growers had extracted from their new miller, that they handle their own weighing at Rosella and be paid on those weights.

## Closure Again

In spite of the Homebush addition, Disney McGown expected only 90,000 tons in 1922. He crushed 86,000. The mill handled 4,700 tons in a week and expected to reach 5,000 in 1923. McGown was confident he could handle 140,000 tons in a season provided growers kept up daily supplies. (Plane Creek crushed the next largest Mackay tonnage with 54,820 tons.)

New machinery installed for 1923 included a large evaporating pot, a 20 ton pan, six large bottomless fugals and an extra Babcock Wilcox boiler. An extra stack at the boiler station was all that was considered necessary to bring the mill up to target capacity.

The 1923 season was worse. The Australian sugar price dropped to £27 a ton and the mill crushed only 74,000 tons. Mineralised water affected the boilers and locomotives. Crushing rates were reduced. Growers' deliveries were held up by disrupted loco schedules and this made the proportion of stale cane to be treated, high.

Seventy Homebush and Farleigh growers met under the chairmanship of J.M. Mulherin, Farleigh branch president of the newly formed Queensland Producers' Association. They appointed a committee to negotiate with the mill although some, predictably including Philip Kirwan, felt that direct negotiation of problems would

dilute the benefits to be had under the Cane Prices Act. Homebush growers were particularly worried as they still had seven years of their Farleigh agreement to run.

The committee comprised: Homebush representatives — F.H. Stevens, T.F. Ross, H. Swanson, A.S. Hamilton and W. Turner; Farleigh reps. — H. Creese, J.M. Mulherin, T.A. Powell, F. Knobel, S. Hamilton. They were practical farmers and knew the hazards of an underground water supply. McGown satisfied them the quality of the supply would be improved and also reassured them on the capacity and quality of the mill plant, since a large crop then (in early January 1924) was in the making.

Disney McGown resigned and was farewelled from the mill on 29th March 1924. The *Mercury* recorded that staff and mill hands were "visibly affected".<sup>5</sup>

He was replaced by his brother-in-law S.J. (Stan) Axam, who had been at Fairymead for several years. The mill started on 16th July with an estimated crop of 124,000 which was expected to be handled in 24 weeks — a rate of slightly over the target weekly tonnage of 5,000.

Some growers wanted to send portion of the crop to Pleystowe. Almost from the beginning the daily cane supply could not keep the mill going and Axam, perhaps with growers' complaints of the previous year in mind, complained to the Central Board. The mill in fact handled 109,521 tons and 5,400 went to Pleystowe. The crushing rate was just over 5,000 tons a week. The crop from the Farleigh area was 52,000 tons.

Stan Axam was a stern disciplinarian and had several differences of opinion with growers on cane quality and interpretation of the Local Cane Prices Board award. Shareholders provided a "very large" amount of capital in 1924 and Axam planned a comprehensive overhaul for 1925, keeping on 100 men during the slack season. He knew both mill and growers would have to observe tight performance disciplines if Farleigh was to sustain its new scale of operations.

Alex Barrie was appointed chief engineer, a position he had previously held. The mill had eight boilers, four with stop-gate furnaces for burning megas only. The others burned coal. Wood was used for lighting up. The total heating surface was 26,000 sq. ft. No. 3 mill was given new 6 ft. rollers, new juice pumps were put in and six new bottomless fugals installed.

The mill started in June and by early July was comfortably handling 4,800 tons a week. The estimate was 153,000 tons. The season was expected to run for 31 weeks. This was the first season in which the working week had been reduced from 48 to 44 hours.

Alex Barrie was cautious about the capacity of the mill. He said in July 1925 that he was confident it could be got into good shape for 1926; but 1925 still had to be weathered. The crop kept growing and it had a large proportion of Uba and Malagasche, both difficult varieties to mill. Finally after 34 weeks the season finished on 10th February 1926 for a tonnage of 148,000 tons but several thousands of tons were left to stand over.

Axam kept on 120 men for a big slack season programme but in Bundaberg harsh facts were becoming clear. It had been hoped that if Farleigh's work coefficient stayed above that on which it was judged mills could sustain operations under the Cane Prices Act it might be able to operate successfully. The mill "work" did in fact exceed this level but it had to be sustained by a whole lot of less measurable efficiencies. In regard to supply of clean and fresh cane and maintaining full supplies to the mill, the Cane

Prices Act seemed clearly weighted against the mill. Simply applying fines to recalcitrant farmers did not in itself guarantee quality or quantity.

The general efficiencies required could not be implemented without further massive capital injection, which the shareholders were not prepared to provide. For the second time in its history Farleigh closed down.

The axe fell suddenly. Maintenance was in progress at high pressure when on 17th April the men and the *Mercury* were informed that work would be suspended and the men paid off. Staff of the company's auditor, G.E. Jones, were in the middle of an audit and were preparing for a day at the mill when they were told to suspend work on the books. Ten days later the Chairman of Directors (Mr. G.A. Buss) notified the Local Cane Prices Board that Mr. C.P. Christoe had been appointed liquidator and would be in town in a week.

<sup>1.</sup> See Part thirty-two "Buss Cran and Others"; Company records.

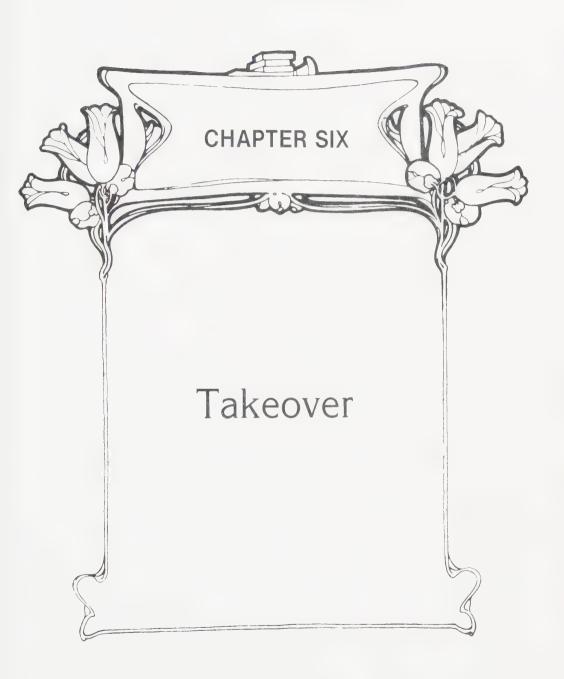
<sup>2.</sup> Details supplied to 1912 Royal Commission.

<sup>3.</sup> Courtesy C.S.R. Archives.

<sup>4.</sup> D.M. 11 5 1921.

<sup>5.</sup> D.M. 12-4-1924.





### Part forty-two

# **CRISIS**

Farleigh closed in the middle of a State election campaign. J.M. Mulherin was contesting Mirani for the A.L.P. against sitting member E.B. Swayne. William Forgan Smith, member for Mackay and Minister for Agriculture was campaigning in Ingham. Premier W. McCormack was in Roma.<sup>1</sup>

On 22nd April, Forgan Smith assured Mulherin the Government would make sure Farleigh crushed. On 26th April, T.A. Powell (then growers' representative on the Central Sugar Cane Prices Board), wired Mackay U.C.G.A. secretary, Andrew Gibson: ".... tell suppliers not to get windy about the position". On 27th April, Swayne urged McCormack to prepare the mill for crushing under Section 20 of the Cane Prices Act. On 30th, McCormack wired Forgan Smith promising to get the mill going.

No one seemed prepared to be committed on particular procedures to be used to start the mill. *Mercury* editor W.J. Manning expressed fears that the Company being in liquidation might make Section 20 of the Act inoperable. On 6th May, local solicitor and Farleigh supplier A.R. Hartley warned that if Section 20 were invoked, litigation could delay start of crushing.

J.J. Hand, growers' representative on the Farleigh Local Cane Prices Board obtained a declaration from the Central Sugar Cane Prices Board that the mill had "failed to prepare for the carrying out of crushing operations", as it was obliged to do under the cane prices legislation. It was hoped that with such failure officially recognised, Section 20 could be satisfactorily invoked. The millers' representative on the Central Board, Mr. B.R. Riley, dissented from the majority ruling and stressed three points: (1) Section 20 did not cover the case of a company in liquidation. (2) Litigation could follow and further negotiation should be allowed. (3) The best solution was to distribute the Farleigh crop among other mills.

E.B. Swayne claimed purchase money for the mill could be obtained through the 1914 Co-operative Sugar Works Act. The Government in 1919 had dodged the Farleigh Company's request to keep the mill open under Section 20 of the Cane Prices Act, saying the 1914 Co-operative Sugar Works Act was the only appropriate medium (though knowing the practical impossibility of such a course). Now it swung the other way. Forgan Smith said: "Mr. Swayne's special appeal seems not to be for the grower but in favour of giving the owner, who broke the law and closed the mill without notice, a cash payment".

C.P. Christoe arrived in Mackay on 27th April. The Company circular had stated: "A co-operative company seems to be the only way out of the difficulty". Christoe said that capital reconstruction was a necessity. He told the *Mercury* he would be prepared to deal "most liberally" with any proposition to form a co-operative company or otherwise to acquire the property.

Rumours abounded of farmers in distress. E.B. Swayne started a fund from which £60 was distributed. The Farleigh cane suppliers' committee, T.G. Mulherin, C.A.

Denman and J.J. Hand, found only two cases of distress in the district and established that no one had been refused credit either at the mill, the mill store or at the Coningsby store.

By accident T.G. Mulherin, the suppliers' committee chairman, found himself leading a few people endeavouring to secure the mill for the growers. His brother Jack (the election candidate opposing Swayne) had been prominent in local and district Queensland Producers' Association affairs and was also chairman of the Farleigh cane suppliers' committee (a local body independent of the Q.P.A., the U.C.G.A. or the A.S.P.A.). After he sold his farm to Mr. Joe Trevaskis no one would take his chairman's job and Tom Mulherin agreed to fill the position for a year only.

Tom Mulherin for the next three years kept a diary from which most of the takeover story has been taken or cross checked.

The diary records: "The liquidator offered to sell to the farmers for £250,000". The Farleigh cane suppliers' committee, T.G. Mulherin, C.A.L. Denman and Jack Hand, with four from Homebush, F.H. Stevens, D.L. Ross, A.S. Hamilton and R. Turnbull, negotiated on the basis of a Government guarantee of a bank loan. Forgan Smith assured Mulherin that the Government would guarantee "a reasonable amount" but significantly the diary notes: "not witnesses were present when he made this admission".

Homebush growers decided to negotiate with other mills. At Farleigh a committee of 12 was formed, comprising the three suppliers' committee members (Mulherin, Denman and Hand) plus P. Kirwan, F.J.E. Holt, W.B. Fordyce, J.B. Kelly, H.C.J. Hansen, F. Knobel, J. Trevaskis, S. Hamilton and C. McGown. The diary says: "After a keen debate (we) decided to form a company, six for, five against, Hamilton not voting. We just had enough to sign the articles".

Forgan Smith had sent for the State Director of Agriculture, Lewis R. Macgregor. The diary says: "He told us he could fix us up by forming a co-operative company, thus saving much money". Macgregor and Hartley, with Mulherin constantly on hand drew up the articles of a co-operative association. These were signed by J.B. Kelly, J.J. Hand, J. Trevaskis, F. Knobel, H.C.J. Hansen, S. Hamilton and T.G. Mulherin.

The pieces were falling into place but still no decision had been taken by the main body of growers to buy the mill. One scheme widely canvassed was for "one big mill", with a capacity of 300,000 tons to crush the Racecourse, Homebush and Farleigh crops. Pleystowe and Marian were also included in general thinking involving a district "big mill". The Farleigh committee of 12 plus four from Homebush called on Racecourse chairman, J.M. McDonald whose directors had seriously discussed the proposal. McDonald said the scheme "was off for the time being and advised the Farleigh suppliers to buy their own mill as quickly as possible".

On 7th May 1926, the Farleigh Co-operative Sugar Milling Association Ltd. was registered under the Primary Producers' Co-operative Associations Act of 1923, with a capital of £500,000 in £1 shares. The first meeting of directors was held at the office of Messrs. Gorton and Hartley (solicitors) at 2.30 p.m. on 10th May 1926. Present were the same seven who had signed the articles. They decided unanimously on the motion of J.B. Kelly and F. Knobel that T.G. Mulherin be chairman of directors.

It had been a high pressure fortnight but still only the preliminaries had been completed. A price still had to be settled on and negotiated with the liquidator before the new sugar milling association owned a mill.



Provisional Directors 10th May to 26th June 1926. L. to R.: S. Hamilton, F. Knobel, T.G. Mulherin (chairman), H.C.J. Hansen, J.B. Kelly, J.J. Hand (hon. sec.), J. Trevaskis.

On 29th May, another major part of the pattern fell into place. Farleigh suppliers decided to buy the Farleigh and Homebush assets for £150,000, subject to an engineer's inspection. Capital would be sought under Government guarantee to begin with and then by a levy on cane not exceeding four shillings a ton. It was a long way below Christoe's price and now Mulherin had to switch his negotiating skills from the growers to the liquidator. The *Mercury* said the price was reasonable, pointing out that in 1919 it had cost £100,000 to buy the smaller mill of Invicta at Bundaberg and reerect it on the Haughton River.

The directors canvassed the district. Often afterwards Mulherin praised Jack Hand, who as a patient and unobtrusive secretary proved an invaluable backstop to the campaign. W.B. Fordyce, with a reputation for unimpeachable judgment in North Side affairs, won a lot of support for the cause. Maltese settlers were then coming into the area. They knew nothing of the arguments but almost to a man those he contacted accepted his view.

Fred Knobel was likewise unequivocal in his support. J.B. Kelly and Joe Trevaskis campaigned with rough, earnest forthrightness, a style with which Trevaskis was to enliven many a Farleigh meeting for years to come. More restrained but no less insistent was H.C.J. Hansen. Sam Hamilton's case, as one old grower recalled, was best summed up in one sentence "If we don't get this mill we're done for". (It seems Hamilton's abstention on the vote to form a company was dictated by considerations of how best to secure grower support, not because of lack of confidence in a takeover).

Tom Mulherin had asked Forgan Smith to bring to Mackay an engineer named Chalmers, who had supervised the erection of Tully mill in the previous year. (Tully

was the last Government backed mill to be built in Queensland.) Chalmers forecast an operating loss for 1926 and estimated that at least £50,000 was needed in capital expenditure fairly quickly. The growers reduced their offer to £120,000. Meanwhile two other engineers had put the value of the assets at £190,000. An impasse developed and Christoe returned to Bundaberg.

The Farleigh and Homebush suppliers' committees then offered Christoe £130,000, at five per cent interest, payable in 20 annual instalments. From this would be deducted £5,000 to be found by the Association for putting the mill into working order. The balance of the money needed for this purpose would be provided by the vendors but not added to the purchase price.

The net £125,000, with interest, was to be redeemed as follows: £3,150, including principal and interest out of 1926 crushing proceeds; £8,000, including principal and interest in each of the following four years and the balance to be met after 1930 in 15 equal annual instalments. All payments were to be made within the limits of a four shillings a ton levy on cane.

It was June and the harvest period was on top of them. Growers were uneasy and the "big mill" idea was again canvassed as an alternative to purchase, particularly at Homebush. In any case it seemed prudent to approach other mills about handling the 1926 crop. The liquidator also had his worries. Union Bank Mackay manager, H.G. Cooney, banker for the Company, realised that if the mill did not operate in 1926 the value of the assets would fall sharply. He talked the matter over with Mulherin and the latter subsequently felt a deal could be arrived at for a base price of £135,000.

Mulherin had also talked the matter over with Farleigh Estate chairman, G.A. Buss. "There was now only £10,000 between out prices", he later recalled. "It was no longer a matter of what the assets were worth but what the growers would pay. George Buss was a straightforward fellow with a lot of commonsense. I told him they wouldn't go any higher and to insist on the last £10,000 might abort the deal. He agreed."

Mulherin called his committee of 12 together. He had to convince them to go £15,000 above Chalmers' price. He wrote: "I arranged for Hartley to be available. I knew I had Jack Hand with me but I didn't know if I could muster a majority from the othern ten". (He also had Fordyce and Knobel with him had he known it, but these two seem to have reserved comment on the principle that the committee should not be thought to have capitulated easily on the lower price.)

Years later Mulherin recalled: "They were sceptical so I asked them to give me an hour, in which time they were not to leave the room". Virtually locked in the Mackay Q.P.A. office the eleven waited. Mulherin returned with Cooney and Hartley and the meeting agreed to Mulherin's and Cooney's price. It was then up to C.P. Christoe.

The diary says: "On 16th June we came to terms with the liquidator ..... £135,000 with five per cent interest, payable £12,000 yearly including principal and interest; £5,308 to be deducted from the purchase price and first instalment (for certain liabilities already assumed by the growers) and the liquidator to supply at his own cost approximately £4,500 for material on order.

The take-over was accomplished.

Since Homebush had decided to stay with Farleigh they were entitled to board representation. The provisional directorate which had acted since 10th May was

reformed in two stages. On 26th June, Farleigh growers chose as their directors, T.G. Mulherin, J.B. Kelly, J.J. Hand and W.B. Fordyce.

On 30th June, Homebush added F.H. Stevens, J.R. Waters and C.W. Butt. (Stevens remained an employee of the Association as cane inspector, and had to be replaced under the rules. J. Rae replaced him on 18th October 1926. Mulherin remained as chairman.)

On 2nd July, W.B. Christoe (brother of the liquidator), who had been at Farleigh since 1899, was asked to remain on as secretary. Alex Barrie resigned from ill health and was replaced as engineer by J. Evans on 23rd June. F.H. Stevens, who had been acting chief cane inspector was engaged permanently on 2nd July and A. Searle became cane inspector for Farleigh area. On 18th July, Alex McKinnon became 'mill manager', having resigned a similar position at Pleystowe to take the job.

Hard bargaining still had to be completed and Hartley, Mulherin and Fordyce went to Brisbane. The latter two were voted £25 for the trip. There is no record of what A.R. Hartley's legal fees came to.

The diary for 12th July says: "Conference (in Brisbane) in Forgan Smith's rooms. Present, Forgan Smith, Graham, T.G. Hope, Hamilton (Crown Law), Muir, H.G. Cooney and Feez (Union Bank), Miller (solicitor), C.P. Christoe, Beal (Treasury), Hartley, Fordyce and I. Not much progress. Union Bank insisted on the four shillings a ton levy applying to all Farleigh crop regardless of which mill crushed it. We refused to agree to anything not previously agreed to and the Union Bank had to place the position before their Melbourne office".

Another impasse developed. Christoe returned to Bundaberg but the Farleigh team did not return home until 21st July. "We had to argue point by point", Mulherin recalled. "There seemed to be hidden hazards in each clause". Finally the agreement



First Board of Directors of Farleigh Co-op. Sugar Milling Assn. Ltd. Back L. to R.: J.B. Kelly, W.B. Fordyce, J.J. Hand, Front L. to R.: J.R. Waters, T.G. Mulherin (chairman), C.W. Butt, J. Rae. L. insert F.H. Stevens who was replaced by J. Rae Sept. 1926. In 1927 the Homebush reps. (Messrs. Rae, Waters and Butt retired and were replaced by Geo. Winton (R. insert) and Wm. Pratt and R.I. Robinson (pictured elsewhere).

was hammered out and Forgan Smith honoured his unofficial undertaking to Mulherin that the Government would back a reasonable bank overdraft.

The next call was to the Commonwealth Bank. The diary says: "Some difficulty experienced about finance but it was eventually arranged the Commonwealth Bank finance the mill on condition we assign one fifth of the sugar money to them".

The four shillings a ton levy was to be an ever present reminder to Farleigh growers of the take-over agreement, as they waited 19 years (until 1945) for a distribution of mill profits.

(Each year until the liquidator's debt was repaid, the full four shillings was deducted from growers' mill pays but, except for four seasons, was repaid with the final mill pay of the season it was deducted. The four amounts, for which credits were issued in lieu, were; three shillings in 1926, one shilling in 1928, 3/6d. in 1929 and two shillings in 1930.)

Cooney argued for retention of the whole four shillings, with the amount not required to be put into a reserve fund. Heavyweight business opinion in some quarters did not give the Association much chance of surviving and Cooney naturally wanted maximum security. The reason for his doubts was also the reason for the Farleigh insistence that unused levy money be repaid to growers in the year of levy. The Farleigh crop had become small again. In 1926, 369 growers supplied 71,285 tons of cane. Many producers lived at subsistence level. Growers' expectation of maximum liquidity from each years crop, recognised by James McGown in 1913 and maintained by the Farleigh Company through many difficult years, still remainded fundamental to Farleigh policy on mill pays — and has remained so ever since.

Even as long as 50 years after the take-over, many growers honestly but mistakenly believed four shillings a ton was permanently deducted each year to pay the liquidator. Several still tended to believe farm deeds had to be mortgaged to guarantee the mill's banking operations, in the same way as deeds had to be mortgaged to secure Government finance for Central Mills, but this was not the case.

Security arrangements between growers and their financial backers were tightened in some cases, due to doubts in the business community on Farleigh's chances of survival. Occasionally crop liens were replaced by, or used to strengthen, mortgage agreements but these were unrelated to Farleigh's financial structure.

Another misapprehension was that the State Government had financed the takeover. In fact it was made clear to the provisional directorate, albeit in an unofficial manner, by all who professed to be Government spokesmen that Government cash would not be forthcoming. Forgan Smith arranged for a Government guarantee to cover a Commonwealth Bank limit of £30,000 for the first year only to cover operating expenses. That was the limit of Government financial involvement.

T.G. Mulherin often recounted an anecdote reflecting the nature of the faith in Farleigh's future at that time: "Our situation seemed to grow worse before it started to get better. On a trip to the North Coast we bought some benzine at a country store. I asked the lady if a cheque would be O.K. She replied: "Your cheque would be allright Mr. Mulherin", adding with some apprehension, "you're not going to give me a Farleigh cheque are you?" "

<sup>1.</sup> Main sources for this Part are T.G. Mulherin's diary and D.M. reports during April, May and June 1926.

## Part forty-three

## A ROUGH START

When Tom Mulherin first mounted the steps of the mill office verandah as chairman of directors he reflected that less than a year earlier he had been threatened with forcible removal from that very spot. Without rancour he recalled much later: "Stan Axam no doubt had problems but as suppliers' chairman I had to insist on certain things. He would not agree and when I refused to take 'no' for an answer he said he would have me thrown off".

Like many old locals Mulherin felt that grower ownership of the mill was part of a natural progression in local affairs as much as a business upheaval. He was Mackay born and had grown up on the North Side, attending Coningsby school in the process. His father, Patrick John Mulherin, had come to Australia from County Mayo, Ireland. P.J. Mulherin went to America where he worked with a mechanical cane harvester in Louisiana, U.S.A. In Queensland he spent some time on the Palmer goldfield. On the North Side he became a Kanaka overseer, working across the belt of country loosely called the Farleigh valley stretching in a curve from Ashburton to Wainai.

About 1892 he bought Avondale, a freehold block (Por. 8 Bassett) on Amhurst Creek. (There is also an Avondale on the south side — 740 acres owned in 1888 by Daniel Markey.) P.J. Mulherin's Avondale had earlier been owned by Spiller and in the early 1880's by partners Bryson and Reid. About August 1883, Reid shot himself through the head with a revolver, outside a farm building near a stretch of flat scrub extending to Amhurst Creek. The locality was afterwards known as Suicide Flat.

Ashburton field manager John Stuart bought Reid's share and by 1889 the property was leased to an old Ceylon planter, William Bissett. The block later passed to one of the banks and then was leased to George Voysey and Charles Hunter. Voysey was a Mackay businessman and owned the 25 ft. river trade *Early Dawn*. Hunter is best remembered as proprietor of The Leap Hotel.

About 1892, P.J. Mulherin bought the freehold. He supplied 30 acres of cane to Ashburton in 1894 and had 15 more planted for 1895. The property had a main dwelling, two iron roofed weatherboard houses, men's house, nine-stall stables, several slab outbuildings and Kanaka quarters. Five Islanders were employed in 1895.

A good crop for 1896 included several hundred tons on Suicide Flat. The Ashburton transfer to Farleigh that year delayed the start of crushing until September and in the meantime a killing frost made most of the Avondale crop unharvestable. Then followed the tough times of the late nineties and the drought of the new century. "Our mother used to say the family's fortunes never really recovered after 1896", Tom Mulherin recalled 70 years later.

Young Tom became a good horseman and rifle shot and an energetic social mixer. He joined the local Light Horse Squadron and was among the dismounted lighthorsemen who fought on Gallipoli. His brother Henry Gratton (Chook) also



Farleigh Mill rebuilt after the 1918 cyclone. The change in colour indicates repairs to the damaged stack. Photo: John Oxley Library.

fought on the Peninsula. Tom was wounded and turned 21 on Gallipoli and later was commissioned in the field at Beersheba. In Cairo he rode with an Australian polo team which did very well against a crack Indian Army team. After the war he began growing cane on a block adjoining Avondale. He once said: "James McGown did a lot to foster a happy community and for men like Jack Hand, Bill Fordyce, Fred Knobel and myself, the mill was part of our lives".

The 1926 season began with diversion of cane to other mills on and after 14th July. Farleigh started on 8th September. The diary says: "At the mill all day. Evans (engineer) said at 2 p.m. he would start crushing at 4 o'clock. Rang Cooney and asked him, Manning and Hartley to come out". Significantly it was the liquidator's banker, not the mill's who was invited. He recorded: "I put the first cane into the carrier at five. The mill crushed a little then ceased for final adjustments. Staff and visitors had a drink".

For the next day, in a rare departure from a usually deadpan catalogue of facts, the diary says: "Good rain falling after a long drought augurs well for the success of the mill". Years afterwards one Farleigh veteran commented: "If they could be happy about rain on the second day of a crushing which started as late as that one did they must have been up against it".

Diary entries relate incidents representative of the season's problems: "C.G. Fallon (A.W.U. organiser) and Matsen (local union rep.) objected to H.W.J. Gunning and T.J. Wilson (farmers) working at the mill. The objection to Gunning was withdrawn but they refused to allow Wilson to work on the weighbridge, stating that he had obtained a ticket by false pretences, pretending he was going canecutting; also that Wilson had sold to Italians. They said Wilson was not entitled to employment under the preference clause and asked that Albert Jackson be given the job. To save trouble

we decided to change M. Dunworth from the top office to the weighbridge and put Wilson in top office as c.c.s. clerk". (Wilson had sold to a Maltese settler.)

Later in the year the union declared one grower's cane black after he had paid canecutters with valueless cheques. Mulherin recalled: "We had to tell him (the grower) we couldn't handle his cane. It was a tough decision but we just couldn't risk industrial trouble in a case we couldn't win".

On the diversion of cane, Mulherin said: "We arranged with Marian, Racecourse, Pleystowe and North Eton mills to crush surplus cane. The terms they offered were not

satisfactory but unfortunately we were compelled to accept them".2

The other mills saw the situation differently. Arrangements with Marian indicate the nature of the problems. Central Cane Prices Board secretary, A.R. Henry and T.A. Powell (growers' representative) were on hand to head off complications. Mulherin notes: "Our cane would be sent under the same conditions as applied to Marian suppliers. If Homebush received a derricking allowance they would be prepared to forgo two shillings a ton if called on by Marian's bank. Failing that, Marian would take delivery on rail at Rosella and allow nothing for derricking". A further entry says: "..... decided to offer Marian 30,000 tons f.o.r. Rosella provided that in the event of Marian having a profitable season we expect a refund of the amount expended by Farleigh in haulage and reloading charges". With similar arrangements applying to the other mills the scope for confusion was infinite.

The assisting mills viewed the Farleigh crop without enthusiasm. Homebush had 31 varieties and 55 per cent of the crop was Malagasche, a bad milling variety. Much of the cane was rat damaged and there were thousands of tons of standover. North Side growers grew a lot of Uba, which was worse to treat than Malagasche.

Marian took its first deliveries in July while Mulherin was in Brisbane. Soon after arriving back he wrote: "Went to Pleystowe to arrange crushing of (2,000 tons of) grub eaten and frosted cane. R. Clarke (manager) noncommittal, promised reply tomorrow".

On 29th July: "J. McDonald (Racecourse chairman) rang and said Racecourse would take 600 tons of damaged cane weekly". On 5th August, Marian and North Eton refused to take damaged cane from the North Side. Pleystowe would not accept Uba.

On 9th August, Mulherin inspected Homebush cane which Marian had complained about and found it "truly unfit for crushing". The day before, a 2,000 tons burnout—"McAleese and Adams mainly"— required special harvesting and crushing arrangements. Two days after this he found the cane "practically valueless" on six Oakenden farms. This meant more talks with North Eton.

From all this came one incident which was to be recalled with amusement in Farleigh and Marian board rooms in future years. The rather loose arrangement with Marian on Rosella weights had finally to be settled in the following February. The diary records: "To Marian by car in pouring rain. Were kept waiting for nearly an hour for directors to see us. Then A.J. Coyne (chairman) and S. Watt (secretary) came out and said they had to catch a train in a few minutes. The remaining directors saw us but decided not to give us any extra on the cane. Although we put up a fight and told them a few home truths we received no satisfaction".

Meanwhile the question of Rosella weights was bubbling into litigation between the Association and its Homebush grower members. The directors were determined



Top: Farleigh Mill in 1926. In the right foreground is an emergency derrick built to transfer cane to Government rail for delivery to other district mills which helped crush Farleigh's 1926 crop. Photo: R. Belbin, Mackay.

Bottom: Farleigh Mill in 1971.

Homebush growers would not be paid on their own weights and believed the Local Cane Prices Board Award for 1926 (allegedly agreed to by the Homebush people and particularly by their secretary R. Turnbull) made it quite clear, weights taken at the mill would apply.

Discrepancies between mill weights and Rosella weighbridge weights ran up to 10 per cent against the mill. Before the end of the 1926 crushing, the directors told Homebush growers the mill would not pay the difference between Rosella weights and the weights recorded at other mills accepting diverted cane.

The Rosella weighbridge recording system was not good. A record book went missing during 1926 and an officer was suspended. The book turned up and he was reinstated. The Board had complaints of unauthorised persons at the weighbridge and finally decided to send director J.B. Kelly to Rosella for two weeks "to supervise and tighten up loading operations".

Homebush declared the Award change from payment on Rosella weights had not been authorised by them and appealed to the Central Board, declaring in part that R. Turnbull had not agreed to the award change and that in any case he was not the Homebush representative at the time he was alleged to have done so.

Mulherin and J.R. Waters, on the usual vote of £25 for a Brisbane trip, went south "to look after the mill's interest". D.L. Ross and A.S. Hamilton went down from Homebush. The mill won the case.

Mulherin and Hamilton came to be regarded as extremely tough negotiators in local public life. On this occasion the latter was half beaten before he left home. Mulherin explained: "On the train to Brisbane it became clear we needed proof that Turnbull

had agreed to the award change. I had a document which made this clear but I decided to keep it to myself. I wired Jack Hand to ask Hartley to try to get an affidavit that Turnbull had in fact agreed. This never materialised but I did not tell Douglas, our barrister, of the paper I had on me. During the hearing I produced it. The barrister for the Homebush people asked why this had not been produced before. Our man seemed a bit embarrassed but he could only say he had never heard of it".

Hamilton and Mulherin remained friends after the incident. The diary of 13th June 1927 records: "Bought a dog from Alex Hamilton and gave it to Peter Hand".

Rain stopped the 1926 season on 10th January 1927. The weekly throughput averaged 4,465 tons at an hourly rate of 34.86 tons. The target of 5,000 tons a week could only be reached with overtime. The mill worked double shifts in the last fortnight on cane refused by the other mills. In the circumstances the co-efficient of work of 92.3 was creditable. The season's profit was £5,525. Losses from diverting Homebush cane were £6,932 and from Farleigh £412.<sup>3</sup>

As the old Company had found, Homebush was a problem. In November 1926, Mulherin and Waters interviewed Forgan Smith seeking a tramline survey from Rosella to Foulden. It would have meant a long, low bridge across the Pioneer River. Then a glimmer of light appeared. On 16th December, D.L. Ross came to the mill "for an informal chat with the Farleigh Mill Suppliers' Committee", of whom Mulherin was chairman. Ross also talked with the four Farleigh area directors. The diary notes: "We afterwards spoke of Homebush being re-assigned to Racecourse and North Coast to Farleigh".

That chat must rank as one of the major events in Farleigh's history.

The North Coast crop from St. Helens, Mt. Ossa and Silent Grove totalled about 30,000 tons distributed among Racecourse, Pleystowe and Proserpine, but mostly to Racecourse.

<sup>1.</sup> T.S.F.M. p 31; old timers' recollections of the property crosschecked with a variety of D.M. references.

<sup>2.</sup> First annual report to shareholders 18-6-1927.

<sup>3.</sup> First annual report to shareholders 18-6-1927.

## Part forty-four

# HOMEBUSH — OAKENDEN

At the time D.L. Ross and T.G. Mulherin discussed North Coast assignment to Farleigh, many northern growers weren't keen on any change. They were assigned to two established mills and in 1926, Farleigh's recent track record was poor. In May 1926, J.C. Galletly (James Croker's former Beaconsfield manager), a prominent Mackay Farmers' League member and secretary of the Q.P.A. zone which took in North Coast, reported that at Kolijo a mass meeting of farmers from St. Helens and Mt. Ossa, "strenuously opposed assignment of their cane to Farleigh mill"."

The meeting also discussed erection of a centrally situated mill of 600,000 tons capacity, "to treat all Mackay district cane in under three months". This idea had gained support in parallel with suggestions of the "big mill" scheme to handle Racecourse, Homebush and Farleigh and perhaps Pleystowe crops, although district millers were sceptical of both proposals.

On 22nd January 1927 T.G. Mulherin, J.R. Waters and D.L. Ross met Racecourse mill chairman, J.M. Gibson (who had replaced J. McDonald) and four of his directors, Ghodes, Wescott, Webster and McLennan. A direct swap of Homebush for North Coast had been suggested but Farleigh would not agree and was not interested in taking over the tramline, Racecourse had recently built from Mt. Ossa to Silent Grove. Farleigh was prepared to relinquish Homebush if the price was suitable and agreed that Racecourse should investigate finance for linking Homebush and Racecourse tramway systems.

Three days later Mulherin, Waters and Ross discussed with J.W. Inverarity at Pleystowe, a swap of Homebush for Pleystowe's Habana cane. On 31st January J.M. Gibson told Mulherin, Racecourse growers had authorised their directors to negotiate for Homebush cane and to form a co-operative milling association. On 6th February Mulherin told Homebush growers, Farleigh's bedrock price for its Homebush assets was £45,000, Homebush to forfeit share rights and Farleigh to refund the levy of 13 pence a ton outstanding on the 1926 crop.

On 11th February Farleigh board weighed the relative merits of North Coast and Habana cane. A tramway to Habana would cost £6,000 or a net 3/6d. a ton. North Coast cane would cost 3/1d. a ton. They opted for North Coast cane, paying 20 miles freight and no derricking allowance, leaving it optional for growers to join Farleigh as shareholders. A week later J.W. Inverarity and Robert Clarke offered Pleystowe tramway assets from an overhead bridge at Coningsby to Habana for £20,000. Mulherin declared the price ridiculous and countered with an offer of £6,000, which drew a reciprocal reaction from Pleystowe.

The next day, 19th February, Racecourse provided a car and J.M. Gibson, J.J. Hand, J.B. Kelly, W.B. Fordyce, H.G. Cooney, Alex McKinnon and Tom Mulherin set out for the North Coast. The car was overcrowded and it was the middle of the wet season. The diary notes: "Road almost impassable . . . . . . tea at Wm. Pratt's, slept at Noel Manning's".

They visited farmers next day at St. Helens, Mt. Ossa and Silent Grove up to a point where a landslip barred their way. Encouraged by their reception, Mulherin and Hand called a Farleigh growers' meeting to empower directors to let Homebush go and negotiate for North Coast and Habana. The meeting, on the last Saturday in February, agreed to Homebush secession but gave no instruction about securing alternate cane, although discussion favoured Habana. Thus North Coast wariness of Farleigh was reciprocated at the Farleigh end. It was a significant straw in a heightening breeze. The two areas watched each other warily for the next 30 years.

The first Friday in March saw tangled negotiations: "Farleigh directors met the (Q.P.A.) zone committee in the morning — Wm. Pratt, R. McIntyre, W. Denman, W. Holding and J.C. Galletly. They seemed agreeable to coming to Farleigh if we paid 20 miles freight and nine pence a ton (for) derricking. They seemed anxious to come in as

shareholders". The nine pence a ton was agreed to.

After dinner (midday) an Oakenden group met Farleigh directors and Homebush and Kolijo committees met. (Homebush mill had acquired Oakenden cane after the failure of the Oakenden Sugar Company in the late 1880's. A planned £18,000 mill was not shipped from Glasgow and cleared land was rented to the C.S.R. Company.)

Oakenden growers were keen to go to North Eton. Farleigh offered them two miles of main line for £2,000 and two miles of "horse" line for £400. A few Oakenden growers held back so Farleigh reduced its claim for a repayment levy from one shilling to sixpence a ton.

Next came a meeting with the Homebush committee plus J.M. Gibson and John A. Michelmore from Racecourse. Farleigh repeated its price of £45,000 for Homebush assets, payable in equal instalments over 14 years at 5 per cent interest, Homebush to forfeit share rights and Farleigh refund 13 pence a ton (on the 1926 crop) from the liquidator's levy "when it was available". The diary says: "Homebush was inclined to argue but Michelmore told them they had the price, take it or leave it"."

The basis for a settlement was thus laid down but much negotiating lay ahead. Liquidator C.P. Christoe and his banker, H.G. Cooney feared the Homebush disposal would reduce their Farleigh security. Farleigh manager Alex McKinnon had to assure them that rumours of North Coast cane being poor for milling were wrong. Cooney withdrew his objections on being assured the liquidator's levy of 4 – a ton would still apply to Homebush.

Cooney seems not to have pressed the question of how the levy would continue if Homebush cane supplied another mill but threw in another complication by asking for nine lease documents which had not been handed over when Farleigh had acquired Homebush from the C.S.R. Company.

J.M. Gibson and D.L. Ross returned to Mackay from Bundaberg on 5th March with C.P. Christoe's agreement to the Homebush transfer to Racecourse, provided the liquidator's security was not impaired. Two days later Christoe advised Farleigh of his approval and the Homebush transfer to Racecourse was over bar resolution of a few residual details: "Farleigh agreed to (Homebush) retaining all the horses used at Rosella last (1926) season. We could not agree on molasses tanks and could find no trace of them either in Farleigh or Homebush inventories so we compromised and took one each. They wanted to be paid for a few cows sold last year but we thought that a bit too solid".

C.P. Christoe arrived at Mackay on 14th March and signed the transfer agreement.

Farleigh was to get £45,000 and the 4/- a ton liquidator's levy was to apply to Homebush cane until the £45,000 was paid.

Present for the signing (in the Q.P.A. rooms in Sydney Street) were: T.G. Mulherin, W.B. Fordyce, J.J. Hand, J.B. Kelly and F. Knobel (Farleigh board); J.M. Gibson and John A. Michelmore (Racecourse board); W.A. Wright (Racecourse solicitor) and the Homebush negotiating committee, let by D.L. Ross. The liquidator raised no objection to Farleigh refunding Homebush growers all payments in the 4/- levy exceeding £4,000 a year and had no official interest in whether or not North Coast growers came in as shareholders.

Homebush growers accepted the terms of purchase by 89 votes to one and agreed to form with Racecourse a co-operative association. D.L. Ross, J.E. O'Brien, C.P. Mau and A.S. Hamilton were elected provisional directors, J.R. Waters was unsuccessful in the poll. The articles of association of the Racecourse Co-operative Sugar Association Ltd. were signed on 14th April 1927. Second on the lists of objects was "to acquire from the Farleigh Co-operative Sugar Milling Association Ltd. . . . . . the Homebush tramway system".

Oakenden's transfer to North Eton still had to be cleared up. Here the story retracks to 1920 when the C.S.R. Company was considering closing Homebush. North Eton wanted more farms and in February 1921, Homebush growers C.W. Butt, T.F. Ross and J.J. Porter took North Eton manager T.W. Peele (Farleigh's secretary of the 1890's) over possible Eton country up to the Homebush tramway terminus at Sandy Creek. In late 1925 when Farleigh was pushed for crushing time, 115 chains of tramline had been built to divert Oakenden cane to North Eton, where many people hoped the arrangement would be permanent.

Early in August 1926, Peele told Mulherin and Hand a group of Oakenden growers had sought his support for their re-assignment to North Eton. Farleigh board agreed provided Oakenden growers bought their line. C.P. Christoe hedged until he had protected his liquidator's security.

On 18th October 1926, Messrs. Emmet O'Brien, G. Sunderland and C. Smith, from Sunnyside, offered liquidator's valuation of £700 for 9½ miles of tramline, which they would link to Racecourse. Mulherin, Kelly, Hand and Farleigh's Homebush directors, Rae, Butt and Waters boarded a loco at Homebush and went to Sunnyside on 24th October. They agreed to let Sunnyside growers go provided share rights were forfeited.

Other objections were raised. North Eton was a Central Mill and W.J. Short, general manager of the Bureau of Central Mills, initially opposed the Oakenden proposal. Some Farleigh shareholders also objected. They had seen their mill starved for cane for 30 years, apart from a temporary oversupply in 1925 and weren't keen to give away established crops.

The diary of 15th March 1927 records the settlement: "To Oakenden with Gibson and Waters. S.H. Scougall (North Eton cane inspector) present, also Homebush committee. Oakenden growers . . . . . with four exceptions . . . . . prepared to pay difference between £21 and the final price for sugar at North Eton; to build the tramway from Oakenden to North Eton and to pay about sixpence a ton to buy the Oakenden tramway (from Farleigh) which they would give to North Eton. McFarlane, Brand and son and Melton wouldn't agree"

Finally all parties agreed as follows: "Oakenden . . . . . form a co-operative association to acquire tramline, North Eton to maintain the line on condition they had control of running rights for 14 years. The four objectors would be assigned to Racecourse which would divert their cane to North Eton which would pay sixpence a ton to the Oakenden co-operative to haul that cane''. This was in effect the dissenting

growers' share in buying the line.

The formal transfers became enmeshed in unresolved details. The Farleigh Local Cane Prices Board sat to frame the 1927 award on 5th April when Homebush was not legally separated from Farleigh and when North Coast lands were not yet assigned to Farleigh. A.R. Hartley drew up an agreement giving Homebush possession as from May 23rd. Racecourse solicitor W.A. Wright was to prepare a sale contract. Mulherin thought Hartley's document "a bit drastic". A.S. Hamilton refused to sign and so did all other Homebush suppliers.

Farleigh had to pay its Homebush staff for another week but would not alter the agreement. As well, Farleigh wanted payments to begin from 1st January 1927; Homebush wanted them to begin on the still undetermined date of possession. Legal proceedings by Homebush against Farleigh for recovery of the difference between Farleigh and Homebush weights were still pending but were dropped during the period of disagreement on the transfer.

A.R. Hartley and W.A. Wright were unable to agree so J.M. Gibson and T.G. Mulherin took the agreement draft to a third solicitor, W.A. Amiet. The two mill chairmen took Amiet's amendments direct to their respective boards where they were approved. Mulherin backed down to "an absolutely final" transfer date of 10th February. Gibson would not accept it. On 3rd June: "Met Jack Michelmore at the Military Ball. I told him we should toss — whether date of possession be 10th February or 8th March. He did not like the idea of tossing but was agreeable to 8th March".

On 9th June Gibson rejected the toss suggestion and Farleigh backed down to 1st March. Racecourse still held out. Finally on 16th June, Farleigh agreed "to pay interest up to 15th March, Racecourse to pay for all materials after March 8th and Farleigh refund rates collected after 31st March". Next day the agreement was signed. Goodwill prevailed and the following Saturday at a luncheon following Farleigh's first annual meeting, Mulherin proposed a toast to Racecourse and J.M. Gibson responded.

A final loose end remained. On 13th June, S.H. Scougall (North Eton) rang saying Oakenden growers were not satisfied. The matter was cleared up but it left another problem. North Eton and Racecourse could not agree where on the Homebush tramline the boundary between the two mill areas should be. On 13th July, Mulherin 'picked up Shield (surveyor) and with F.H. Stevens went to Oakenden. Met Geo. Johnson, S.H. Scougall and Jackson (North Eton) and A.S. Hamilton, C.P. Mau and S. Axam (Homebush)'.

After a long discussion the boundary was decided on in a classic bush lawyers' agreement. It was marked by "the joint in the rails on the Homebush side of the old pit used by Whittington near Brand's turnoff. McFarlane's cane below Brand's turnoff to go to Racecourse and that higher up (also McFarlane's) to go to North Eton if he could be persuaded to apply for assignment to that mill. The line to be surveyed by Shields. Eton to pay for the line at the rate of £1,000 a mile for loco line and £200 a mile for horse line, the balance . . . . . over or under . . . . . to be paid for or received by Racecourse".

Thus were the old C.S.R. Homebush assets disposed of. The main part of the system

went to Racecourse for £42,600 and Oakenden to North Eton for £2,400 reducing Farleigh's overall debt to the Bundaberg liquidator by £45,000. Farleigh's destiny was soon to become inextricably linked with the North Coast.

### Part forty-five

## NORTH COAST — EARLY DAYS

Farleigh's link with the North Coast was on the cards as early as Frank Amhurst's negotiations with the Hilflings in 1873. In June that year, Foulden manager Robert Walker and W.G. Macartney of Bloomsbury station chartered the schooner *Diamond* to explore Repulse Bay. They returned to Mackay on 13th July, having paid particular attention to the Andromache River, the O'Connell and Proserpine Rivers and Dempster's Creek. At each of the last three they found water up to 10 ft. at low tide, sufficient for coastal trading vessels. They applied for land in the area.<sup>1</sup>

Originally, in 1863, on the North Coast, J.A. Macartney of Waverley, Broadsound, planned to select more than 300 square miles. In his lifetime, Macartney owned 32 properties from Victoria to Northern Australia. The northernmost was Florida with a 300 mile coastline on the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Arafura sea.

In the 1850's in Central Queensland he kept droving cattle to the limit of explored territory, depasturing on new runs as he went. He was on Waverley from 1858 to 1896. His last home was Ormiston, where he died in 1917. He was the son of Rev. Hussey Burgh Macartney D.D., first Anglican Dean of Melbourne.

Two of his cousins joined him in his Central Queensland exploration and droving enterprises — John and William, sons of the Rev. William Isaac Macartney of More Abbey, County Kildare, Ireland. The three were grandsons of Sir John Macartney, first Baronet of Lish who had been knighted by King George III for work on canals and inland navigation in Ireland.

The fifth baronet, Sir Alexander Macartney, Mt. Jukes canefarmer and Marian mill director, recorded that J.A. Macartney sold the North Coast run (known early as St. Helens and stretching from the Balnagowan boundary to the Andromache River) before it was stocked, to John and William G. Macartney (known respectively as

<sup>1.</sup> D.M. 10-5-1926.

<sup>2.</sup> Evidence to 1889 Royal Commission.

<sup>3.</sup> This and subsequent quotes are from T.G. Mulherin's diary.



Sir John Macartney, an original selector of St. Helens lands. Photo: "Daily Mercury".

"young Johnny" and "Willie" who were joined by their cousin by marriage Robert W. Graham.

The three later dissolved partnership. "Young Johnny" took Jolimont in the Hampden-Mt. Jukes area. R.W. Graham retained St. Helens in the centre and "Willie" took territory in the north he later named Bloomsbury.

This presumably was an informal arrangement since applications for the four runs which comprised the original area were received as follows: St. Helens No. 1 (later called Jolimont) applied for by John and William Macartney and R.W. Graham 4th July 1863; No. 2 (always called St. Helens) by John and William Macartney and R.W. Graham 4th July 1863; Nos. 3 and 4 (later called Bloomsbury) by William G. Macartney on 15th October 1863. Nos. 3 and 4 were consolidated into one 75 sq. miles run on 19th February 1864.<sup>3</sup>

Records of commencement of the respective leases show that the pattern of ownership changed again: St. Helens No. 1 (Jolimont) 1st January 1864, J. and W. Macartney and R.W. Graham, transferred to J. Macartney in 1872; No. 2 (St. Helens) 1st January 1864, J. Macartney, joined by R.W. Graham and J. McLaren in 1868. W.G. Macartney retained Bloomsbury.<sup>4</sup>

J. Macartney (who became Sir John in 1867) was later joined by A.E. Garnier and A.K. Murray. They sold Jolimont to A.R. McGregor and J. McLean in 1880, who added freehold to it which they named Royston.

Sir John settled at Forest Hill (which adjoined Seaforth) and died in Rockhampton in 1911. The title went to his son William and then to William's brother Alexander. The sixth baronet and present incumbent (who like William and Alexander chooses not to use the title) is another Sir John, a retired farmer of North Mackay.

J.A. Macartney decided to examine the coastal strip between the Pioneer Valley and the O'Connell River after discussions with G.E. Dalrymple, Kennedy District Land Commissioner.

The site for the original St. Helens station was chosen by John ("Young Johnny") and W.G. Macartney who sailed their 36 ft. cutter *Wave* up St. Helens Creek at high

tide to a reach, now called the Yellow Bank from the colour of the clay exposed on the left bank. They made the station within a mile to the north. Subsequently *Wave* was a familiar sight on Repulse Bay waters, sailing to a berth well up Blackrock Creek.<sup>5</sup>

Robert Graham with J. Macartney ("Young Johnny") accompanied by J.C. Binney, drove cattle up from Waverley, arriving at Mackay on 4th May 1863. Binney took them on and began forming St. Helens. The next year he helped W.G. Macartney form Bloomsbury.

J.C. Binney had joined J.A. Macartney at Waverley in 1861. In 1862 he rode with Nat Buchanan from Fort Cooper to form Bowen Downs. In 1867 he planted the first cane for Hewitt and Romilly at Pleystowe and helped G.N. Marten and E.M. Long set up Branscombe. He was Mackay Town Clerk from 1876 to 1881 and was Clerk of the Pioneer Divisional Board and Clerk of Works from 1881 to 1884. He was first secretary of the Hospital Board in 1871 and held the position for well over 40 years.<sup>6</sup>

The beginning of St. Helens was not easy. The main building was like a block house, with slits from which marauding blacks could be fired on. (Mr. Alan Pratt has observed that for contact with blacks the site probably was badly chosen. It adjoins coastal mangrove areas highly productive of food and later settlers uncovered evidence that the area had been a tribal base probably for centuries.)

Early in 1864 veteran Queensland explorer and settler Dan Conner, then living at Landsdowne near Port Mackay, not trusting shipping schedules, overlanded to Bowen to be sure to catch a sale of Mackay lands. Clouds of sandflies and steady rain which caused even this hardy old bushman to complain about the impossibility of lighting a fire, made the trip miserable and he was pleased to find a bunk at St. Helens. Later he ruefully related that a cyclone that night severely battered the station.

St. Helens and the township of Calen, which grew up after the completion of the North Coast railway in 1923, became the focal district of Farleigh's North Coast area.

The Mercantile Bank of Sydney took over the property in the late seventies and Dyson Lacy became manager with a proprietorial interest. Lacy had studied medicine in England, had worked for the Finch Hattons and been a partner in district grazing ventures. Sir William Macartney described the Lacys thus: "A fine type of the old English gentleman class which is getting rare nowadays, when the word gentleman often means any man who makes money without working and manages to keep out of gaol".

Their 16-year-old daughter Emily was the heroine of the disaster in which the British India steamer *Quetta* struck a needle of rock in Torres Strait on the night of 28th February 1890.

She had learned to swim in Blackrock and St. Helens Creeks and at St. Helens and Seaforth beaches and also in the Jumper Lagoons near the second St. Helens homestead just to the north of the present Calen township.

The *Quetta* sank and Emily's young sister May and an uncle were lost. Emily was picked up by the Government steamer *Albatross* 36 hours later after 20 hours swimming and floating alone. A crewman sighted what he believed to be a floating coconut. It was Emily's head. Able Seaman Napier plucked her from the water and wrapped her in his outer shirt. Rev. Albert McLaren of Somerset, Cape York Peninsula, had known the family well at Mackay and was astonished to recognise the girl he knew as "Bunny" Lacy of St. Helens.

Part of Emily's recollections, reported just after the rescue, put a poignant finish to

the "bit part" sugar pioneer Captain Claudius Buchanan Whish has in this story: "On my way (out)", she said, "I heard Mrs. Whish say to Captain Whish, 'Claude, you will take care of me'. They were such dear old people". The couple drowned soon afterwards.

In 1905 from Matlock, England, Dyson Lacy sent a brass tablet to be placed next to a memorial window in the church at Thursday Island. It was inscribed Kathleen Mary (May) Lacy b. 8th February 1877 d. 28th February 1890.

Years afterwards Sir William Macartney recalled meeting with the Lacys before the tragedy, on one of their many excursions to Seaforth from St. Helens in their 22 footer *Polly*. An Aboriginal woman was teaching Emily to swim. Her mother had remarked: "You never know when such an accomplishment may be urgently needed in the bush".

After W.G. Macartney died in Sydney in April 1883, (aged 48), Dyson Lacy as a friend and estate executor helped Mrs. Macartney until she retired to Proserpine about 1891. The Queensland National Bank as mortgagees, took over and relinquished the lands in 1913.<sup>7</sup>

The Lacys left during the nineties and returned to England. The Commercial Bank of Australia engaged John Robert Smith to manage St. Helens. The bank gave up the station in 1900–01 and Smith took up some of the resumed land. He also took up country at Silent Grove with James Pollock, formerly manager of Bloomsbury. Smith bought the horses off Seaforth and acquired a Seaforth block. He acquired a butchering business from Simon McLennan at Marian, Mirani and Pinnacle and bought D.H. Dalrymple's Hamilton homestead in 1903.8

Robert Gray Moffatt purchased the unresumed St. Helens lands in 1901 plus a subdivision of two square miles. He sold to a partnership comprising J.R. Smith, William Bagley and J. Michelmore in 1913.9

In 1904, well known teamster Patrick McDermott with his wife Margaret, overlanded with their family from Newbury to settle on the south bank of St. Helens Creek in the vicinity of the Yellow Bank. To some extent they moved contrary to a popular trend for Pioneer Valley settlers were then preparing blocks for cane for Cattle Creek mill which opened in 1906. McDermott and his friend Steve Senini were attracted by timber, especially red cedar, in the North Coast's creek and hill scrubs. As one of the McDermott sons, Andrew, put it many years later: "Cedar to a man with a feel for timber was like gold to a prospector".

On the expedition to St. Helens, the family sheltered under their loaded wagons from a fierce afternoon storm which struck them at One Mile Creek (about a mile from today's Kolijo). Between here and their final destination they were delayed for a few days as they had to cut part of their track through heavy sapling growth. They passed through Levi Windsor's farm (now the property of Mr. and Mrs. E.L. Dunn, distinguished by a large mango tree, which still stands).

They grew bumper crops of maize and potatoes. In 1915, 30 acres of maize yielded 60 bushells per acre. Prominent among their links with town markets were the cutters *Isabel* (Capt. W. Christensen) and *Osprey* (Capt. T. Daly) which berthed downstream from the Yellow Bank at a point still called The Landing.<sup>10</sup>

Isabel had the main Repulse Bay run. In 1913, Osprey was working the Mackay-Sarina run visiting Victor Island and servicing points south of Sarina. Captain Daly



P.J. McDermott, St. Helens settler of 1904, with skulls of two crocodiles he shot in St. Helens Creek. Photo: McDermott family.

had pioneered trading from Mackay to Proserpine and the Burdekin. He first navigated the Burdekin in 1884.

Cedar getting had its dramatic moments. At Blackrock Creek, logs were hauled to the water, lashed together as rafts and on the right tides floated down to meet John Burke steamers. Breaking the rafts and handling the logs on board ship required skill and not a little courage, particularly if rains had swollen the creek and distorted the normal stream pattern of tidal ebb and flow. Patrick McDermott and his sons Patrick and Hubert starred in these dramas with Arthur Burke and the *Porpoise* in the seaward role. 12

Steam tenders were able to navigate Blackrock Creek and offshore channels for several miles and in the mid-nineties the creek was beaconed.<sup>13</sup>

Subdivisions of resumed Macartney country were in fair demand in the late 1870's and during the 1880's. Plans and rumours of sugar mills kept hopes for development alive until optimism was finally blunted by the 1888 drought. To the hardy settlers who hung on, isolation and small cash returns were an acceptable price for doing their own thing, 19th century North Queensland style. *The Sugar Fields of Mackay* lists only two holdings as occupied in 1894.<sup>14</sup>

Two men associated with St. Helens area enlisted in World War I — Albert Graffunder, who had just started clearing Por. 48 (reselected in 1923 by Noel Manning) and his mate Tom Stocker, who used to give him a hand occasionally. Private Tom Stocker was killed in France. Corporal Albert Graffunder was one of the Light Horse contingent which fought dismounted on Gallipoli. He was killed in a night assault on Turkish trenches. Also in his unit killed that night was Jack Wentford, great

uncle of Farleigh's manager (in 1983) Mr. Barry Sheedy. Among the wounded were Sergeant Tom Mulherin and Private Albert Howard, one of whose sons, Albert, is a well known Mackay pharmacist.

- 1. D.M. June-July 1873.
- 2. Letter D.M. 11-11 1925.
- 3. Details of all early Mackay runs recorded by R. Prideaux D.M. 21-4-1980. This ref.: Q.S.A. CLO N19; CLO N20; CLO 9.
- 4. Documented by J. Kerr Pioneer Pageant pp 15 and 16.
- 5. Detail from J.R. McDermott; Sir Wm. Macartney D.M. 12-11-1925.
- 6. D.M. 1912 Jubilee Edition p 16.
- 7. Date documented by J. Kerr Pioneer Pageant p 16.
- 8. The house was demolished in the 1918 cyclone.
- 9. D.M. 21-6 1919. Details of this locality were researched by Mrs. G. Durnsford for Pindi Pindi school Jubilee publication 1978.
- 10. See Part thirty-eight "Yeomen Farmers" for description of first McDermott St. Helens home.
- 11. Oral details confirmed D.M. 13-6-1913.
- 12. Details from Andrew McDermott.
- 13. T.S.F.M. p 19.
- 14. See Appendix D.

## Part forty-six

# NORTH COAST ACQUISITION

After World War I the Government was urged to open North Coast lands for soldier settlement. In June 1922, 49 St. Helens blocks had been surveyed and the Mackay Canegrowers' Executive sought their early release.

Sir William Macartney had explored the head waters of St. Helens Creek in 1911 — the year he became the fourth baronet. He was an amateur naturalist who later lived an eccentric bachelor life on a St. Helens Creek block. He accurately identified deposits of coal and oil shale and introduced a variety of plants, two of which became well known pests — sida retusa, a tough weed with flax like fibres in its bark and guinea grass, for fodder.



William Pratt, pioneer cane farmer at St. Helens, Photo: Pratt family.

Soldier settlement plans were overtaken by general plans for settlement, which received impetus from forecasts in 1920 that the Brisbane to Cairns railway would soon be completed. Little work was done north of Mackay in 1920–21, but when it was announced in 1922 that the job would be accelerated, settlers pushed northwards and Racecourse and Pleystowe mills arranged to take cane from Hampden, Mt. Ossa, Silent Grove, Mt. Pelion and Kolijo. The latter locality then included all the district to be served by the railway siding soon to be named Calen. (Marian mill already had a tramway to Hampden area).

The pioneer sugar grower at St. Helens was William Pratt who purchased Portion 9 (757 acres) on 13th July 1922 through T.J. Leonard, agent for A.C.H. Palmer of Brisbane. Pratt planted the district's first commercial cane crop a few weeks afterwards and travelled across from his home at Boldon in a Model A Ford truck to work it.

He had builders D.E. McDonald and Son (son and grandson respectively of Donald McDonald of River Estate, Inverness and Auchnacroish) put up a structure 34 ft. by 12 ft. with 10 ft. walls and an 8 ft. verandah. It cost £165/10/6d. and was the Pratt family's residence for two years until an attractive home was built on a terrace overlooking most of the farm. The "new" building still stands.

On 11th August 1922, Pratt applied for a railway siding on Portion 9, agreeing to a Railway Department request that he provide the land. This became Calen. The North Coast railway reached Calen in time for Pratt's 1923 crop to be railed to Racecourse but the north-south link was not completed until 1st December that year near Elaroo.

W.J. Kinnear was visiting his brother-in-law Dave Insch on a farm at the O'Connell River. He has written: "The place and day were about one mile north of Elaroo railway station on the south side of a seven-span bridge on 1st December 1923. An official party from Proserpine arrived on time. Another party, including W. Stirling construction engineer, was to come from Mackay. The train carrying the latter was held up by a hot box near Kolijo and was delayed several hours. Railway

communications were still not established so the Proserpine half of the dignitaries performed the ceremonial final spike driving".

When the Mackay party finally arrived, the onlookers had dispersed and Kinnear had returned to Insch's farm. "Whistle blowing by the drivers of the two engines was all that remained to celebrate the occasion." That was at Elaroo. At Proserpine many hundreds of people arrived in special trains and prolonged festivities and speech making were held.

Mackay hotelier Doug Harrison had the first commercial cane crop at Wagoora in 1923 waiting to go to Proserpine. The block is now owned by the Durnsford family.

At Calen, Hubert McDermott owned two blocks of a square mile each, which he sold to the McIntyre brothers Bob, Jack and Jim. The township began in the vicinity of the junction of today's Main Street and the Bruce Highway with a few shelters of iron and tarpaulins, in some cases "borrowed" from the Railway Department.

Temple's block was on the corner now (1983) occupied by Calen Butchery and Mrs. E. Howell. The first racecourse was established nearby. It was shifted to William Pratt's "top country" on Portion 9 and then in the 1930's across One Mile Creek near Kolijo. The Pratt site later became a football field. Jack McIntyre was the first Race Club president, Noel Manning secretary. Bookmakers were invited but practically anyone could run a book if he paid a fee. Some operated without paying. Many practises would scarcely have stood up to a latter day stewards' enquiry but the races were lively events reflecting an energetic, extrovert and optimistic community.

Settlement followed the railway and communities developed at Mt. Pelion, Mt. Ossa and Silent Grove before Calen became the main centre. Up to 40 pupils, including St. Helens children, attended Mt. Pelion school before one opened at Calen.

Best remembered of the early Mt. Pelion teachers was George Ruscoe in the early thirties. In a community where the value of formal education rated rather less than in latter days, he is remembered for having been a "good bloke", owning a small racing car and shooting a 13 ft. crocodile. He later put himself through university and graduated as a doctor.

The McIntyres and William Pratt pushed hard to make Calen the main St. Helens centre. The former made business and church blocks available. The McDermott family pushed equally hard for Kolijo but geography favoured Calen. Kolijo in the steam train days remained the main railway centre largely by virtue of a pumping station and water tank to service the engines, erected on the south bank of St. Helens creek.

The story now reverts to Farleigh where T.G. Mulherin and his directors were trying to organise the North Coast — Homebush swap with J.M. Gibson and his Racecourse directors.<sup>2</sup>

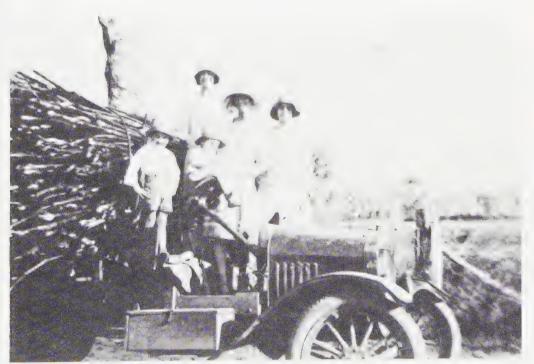
Farleigh suppliers endorsed the Homebush-Oakenden deals and voted to acquire North Coast on 18th March 1927 but North Coast growers still had to be won over. Tom Mulherin's diary of 25th says: "Left town with Gibson and Ghodes in the Racecourse Dodge. Picked up Fordyce, Kelly and Hand, also food at Farleigh and left for Kolijo".

Pleystowe was then offering North Coast growers attractive rail freight and derricking allowances plus farm finance. The northerners wanted Farleigh to pay all freight but Farleigh's offer was for 20 miles only. Gibson said Racecourse would finance ex-Racecourse suppliers but the northerners wanted more than a verbal assurance.

Mulherin had with him a book of share applications and application forms for reassignment from Pleystowe or Racecourse to Farleigh, but he needed few of either. It wasn't a very good trip. It was the middle of the wet season and the North Coast road — rough at the best of times — was in bad shape. The party had been held up by rain at Hampden on the way up and on the way back a swollen Macquarie Creek held them for an hour-and-a-half in the dark. The next day's diary entry says: "Arrived back from Kolijo at 4 a.m. after a strenuous trip".

The Kolijo Q.P.A. zone committee met Farleigh directors and J.M. Gibson and John A. Michelmore of Racecourse the following Friday night. Farleigh continued to resist northern freight demands but, without having any right to do so, Mulherin virtually promised them two seats on the board at the annual meeting in June. This led later to a flurry of correspondence among W.R. Denman, then at Wagoora, North Coast zone chairman Wm. Pratt and his secretary J.C. Galletly to establish just what Mulherin had offered and how the offer could be made good.<sup>3</sup>

Enough North Coast membership applications came in to consolidate Farleigh's grip of the area. Mulherin then had to make good his promise on board membership. He organised an informal meeting of Farleigh growers on 21st May and it was agreed that a week before the annual meeting, growers would choose five men from Farleigh and two from North Coast — highly irregular, but it worked. Fortunately there were no recalcitrant growers at the annual meeting. The seven chosen were: T.G. Mulherin, W.B. Fordyce, J.J. Hand, R.I. Robinson and J.B. Kelly (Farleigh) and Wm. Pratt,



Aboard a loaded Model T Ford cane lorry at Kolijo in 1929. Author at left. Photo: Noel Manning.



The McDermott family's hard tyred Vulcan cane lorry. Photo: McDermott family.

Geo. Winton (North Coast). There has never since been a regional "ticket" at Farleigh elections, nor have the two distinct areas ever been classed as zones.

J.M. Gibson invited Mulherin to the Racecourse annual meeting. Mulherin wrote: "I drove Bill and Fin Pratt out in the mill car". Tom Cowan, W. Pilchowski and other North Coast Racecourse suppliers encouraged him to plan another recruiting trip to Kolijo. He collected Kelly and Hand and they left that afternoon staying overnight at Wm. Pratt's.

Mulherin was able to bolster his case with the fact that Farleigh would repay three shillings of the four shillings a ton 1926 liquidator's levy. He addressed a hastily called but well attended meeting at Kolijo the next day — "the whole crowd decided to come to Farleigh so we accepted them". Some Pleystowe and Proserpine suppliers were included. Subsequently a few who did not want to pay the liquidator's levy were rejected.

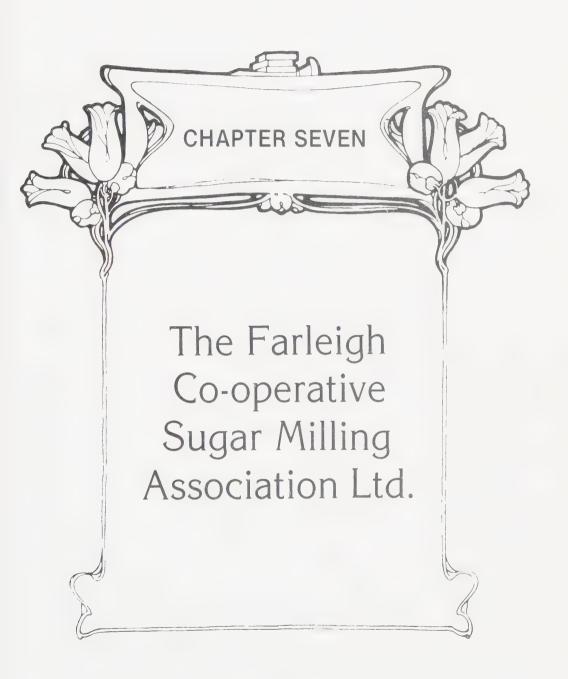
Requests for membership continued to come in. For instance E. Cooley, from the Yalbaroo-Elaroo area wanted to leave Proserpine. F.H. Stevens, appointed cane inspector on 5th May 1927, finally was instructed to accept no cane from north of Wagoora.

It was a satisfactory outcome to a period of doubt and irregularity beginning in April when a local board award had been framed before North Coast had indicated real willingness to come to Farleigh and before it had become clear Homebush would be allowed to leave; then the Homebush disposal reached an advanced stage of negotiation before North Coast opinion swung Farleigh's way. Mulherin had an unerring knack of assessing the winds of local sugar politics, which caused his colleagues to watch his activities with some wonderment for the next 44 years.

L. A.S.J. Vol 14 p 228.

<sup>2.</sup> North Coast events of 1926-27 researched largely from T.G. Mulherin's diary, Wm. Pratt family papers and written and oral recollections of Noel Manning and A.A. and P.J. McDermott.

<sup>3.</sup> Pratt family papers.



### Part forty-seven

# **NEW SETTLERS**

#### The Maltese

On 20th November 1882, the Mackay Planters' Association discussed importation of Maltese farm workers with a Mr. di Caesare, a special Commissioner from the Maltese Government.

His conditions were too tough for the planters — 15/- a week plus board and lodgings with work engagements of from one to two years. Women would work in the fields for 10/- a week. For his part, Mr. di Caesare thought the hours (six  $9\frac{1}{2}$  hour days) too long. The negotiations failed.

Nevertheless 60 Maltese arrived at Townsville in August 1883. "A strong well formed race — the men dark, handsome and lithe — the women with dark eyes, fine hair and easy carriage". Their official chaplain is believed to have been Fr. James Cassar, a scholarly and adventurous priest, who died in Rockhampton in 1927. He was buried in the grounds of the Neerkol Home for Children near Rockhampton.<sup>2</sup>

Some Australians feared the newcomers would erode the standards of established European workers and some of the arrivals weren't greatly enamoured of Australian conditions. They were used to an austere life style but the Australian summer sun was harsher than its Mediterranean counterpart.

In 1882, Hume Black M.L.A. had told Henry Brandon that the Government favoured Maltese and Portugese ahead of coolies as farm workers. J.E. Davidson disagreed but Farleigh's Robert Walker, working up to Farleigh's first crushing the next year, was willing to try them. G.H. Maitland King later watched them work on the Burdekin and declared them unsuitable. None appears to have reached Mackay.'

By the time Farleigh's first Maltese residents arrived in 1911 the Busuttin Brothers, Charlie and Joe, had been in North Queensland for many years. They had married Australian girls and were thought of as "old Australians". Many local Maltese settlers did not at first realise they were fellow countrymen. Joe had married in 1894 and settled at Kalamia. He moved to Proserpine in 1897 where he grew cane until 1918. He and his family then moved to St. Bees Island off Mackay, which they had acquired in 1909, and stocked it with sheep. They later joined their son Arthur who operated Brampton as a tourist resort from 1934–1959. Joe Busuttin died aged 91 in 1954 and his wife Sarah died in April 1968 aged 99 years and five months.

Maltese names appear on Farleigh books of 1912–16, first in 1913, but these few surviving records include names only of farmers, field workers and contractors, not of mill workers.

In August, September and October 1913, cane pays of between £6 and £25 were made to Vella and Co. Andrew Vella is entered as a canecutter. Old identities, including Geatano Zammit, Sam Portelli and Andrew Vella's son Joe are certain Andrew was the principal of the partnership. This means he must have planted cane in 1912. Sam Portelli is sure his elder brother Mick also planted cane that year. Brothers

Joe and Mick Portelli were at Finch Hatton in 1910. Sam believes they came to Farleigh the next year. Joe is believed to have been the first Maltese to work in Farleigh mill. C. Portelli (whom Sam is sure was intended to mean his brother Joe) is entered as a canecutter in 1913 and 1914. Portelli and Bugeja (farmers) appear in 1915. This was Mick Portelli. He probably worked on the Farleigh Estate, or perhaps in the mill, in 1911.

Maintaining mill wood supplies was a major sugar mill task and men with above average output worked on contract. Jim Mifsud and Joe Portelli were partners in a contract in 1915. Jim Mifsud was an uncle of Mrs. Grace Deguara, wife of Farleigh director Frank Deguara. He was a big man and very powerful. Joe Portelli also had exceptional strength and stamina. The success of a contract to a large extent depended on how quickly heavy chord wood could be manhandled and the output of these two was formidable.

Guiseppi Ellul and his brother Moses were contractors in 1914. G. Ellul's son Joe, who was the first Maltese child born in Mackay district records that his father, a vegetable grower and stonecutter in Malta, arrived direct from Malta three months before World War I began. He cut cane in 1914 at Costello's Scrub. He and his brother Moses began farming the following year. Moses Ellul purchased stores from Farleigh in 1915. Joe has explained that the farm was his father's but as he could not read or write in English, transactions were entered in Moses' name.

This farm was leased on land owned by Mrs. Petersen (then of Farleigh Hotel) and known later as Venton's farm (Mr. W.J. and Mrs. E.A. Venton); on parts of Por. 153 and 122 Bassett, it was in the heart of John Spiller's Ashburton country. Mick Portelli's farm on parts of Por. 105, 122 and 146 was on some of the land originally selected by Fritz and Emilius Hilfling. It was next owned by Mrs. Roles, then Guiseppi Ellul then Joe Attard (who married Ellul's daughter Grace) and then by W. Borg.

G. Ellul's wife Carmela and young daughter Grace arrived in 1915. The next Maltese women did not arrive until 1920 when Mrs. Andrew Vella, Mrs. Mick Portelli and Mrs. Charlie Deguara came out.

About 1916–17 G. Bonanno had two partners in a farm near Ashburton — Mick Bugeja and Joe Borg. It is not clear if this was the same Bugeja recorded as farming partner of Mick Portelli in 1915. Borg was a carpenter. At this time he built a house for Jack and Joe Camilleri and Mick and Charlie Deguara at Habana. Bonanno left for the North after about six months. Joe Camilleri and Joe Sherry bought the farm in 1919 and later sold to Sherry's sons, L.J., C.A. and J.L., the present (1982) occupants.

With the names Camilleri and Deguara, the story shifts to Habana, where in 1915, brothers Jack and Joe Camilleri and their cousins Mick and Charlie Deguara bought about 300 acres. Using landmarks of the 1980's, it occupied the southern side of the road to Habana on Reliance Creek and westward of the brow of the hill past the Catholic church. It included the dairy farm owned by Andy Smith (Farleigh's shift chemist in the mid 1970's) and the hills on the south west side of the present store. It was a Pleystowe farm which supplied a small amount of cane to Farleigh by arrangement in 1917.

Brothers Andrew and Charlie Camilleri (father and uncle respectively of Mrs. Grace Deguara) arrived at Habana soon afterwards. They first lived in grass huts which Islanders helped them build, but which were virtually blown away in the cyclone in January 1918.

The day before the cyclone, the Camilleri brothers sold to Mick and Charlie Deguara. Jack Camilleri wanted to keep on buying Habana lands; he believed he could have had most of the Habana country for £1 an acre but his brother Joe had other plans. Both became successful town and rural businessmen. Jack Camilleri never learned to read or write. As an old man, when once asked why, he said he never had the time. Young Joe Ellul married Jack Camilleri's eldest daughter Mary.

The Camilleris and the Deguaras had worked on the Sydney-Kyogle railway prior to coming to Mackay. So had Geatano Zammit. He left Vancouver at the start of World War I. German warships were causing a shipping scare and the journey to Australia took a long detour via New Zealand. He came to Mackay in 1917 and settled on a farm

near Black Mountain in 1918.

During the 1920's the Habana lands were settled in what came to be regarded as the largest area of Maltese owned real estate outside Malta, but the threads of the Farleigh story run back to country near the mill.

After G. Ellul sold to Joe Attard he bought a farm from Rudolph Boese (of the Boese v. Farleigh 1918 litigation). He subsequently sold this to V. Galea who later sold to A.G. and H.G. Daniel and sons. Part of this is now owned by Mick Refalo and is occupied by the Farview Tavern.

Rudolph Boese's brother Jack (who at one stage was 'mine host' of the Glenella Hotel) owned a farm on a road which had connected the mill with Miclere and which became the main Bowen Road, via Farleigh.

Sam Deguara, brother of Mick and Charlie at Habana, arrived in Australia in June 1923 and was soon established on a Habana farm off Neill's road. Barely two seasons later he moved on to Jack Boese's former Bowen Road farm. Known ever since as the Deguara "home farm", it was the beginning of the extensive latter day Farleigh enterprises of three of Sam's sons, Frank (mill director), George (now owner of the "home farm") and Jim (of Jay-D Farming Pty. Ltd.).

Frank Deguara has childhood recollections of small holdings of Melanesians in the hills behind the "home farm", through which the Bruce Highway now runs. Cane used to be brought off the steep slopes by "flying foxes".

- G. Bonanno recalled that Andrew Vella, Jack Chetcuti and a partner whose christian name was Vince grew cane on a farm later owned by Sam Portelli and later still by G.E. and B.A. Powell. J. Muscat and a partner called Tony supplied cane from Wainai. Tony was killed when a horse kicked him while delivering a load of cane to the mill on a wet Saturday afternoon.
- G. Ellul donated land to the Catholic Church but Joe Attard bought it back after he sold his farm to W. Borg and built his home there. The present Church site was bought from Patrick Coogan, son-in-law of Rudolph Boese and father of latter day Farleigh locoman Tom Coogan. The church authorities wanted a re-location from Ellul's site and had earlier purchased other land from Coogan but it was considered too swampy.

The speed with which news spread through the Maltese community intrigued older residents, contributed new vigour to Farleigh affairs and added a new dimension to the meaning of the term "bush telegraph". Cane inspector L.J. (Jack) Tucker developed a rapport with the newcomers.

Community resistance to Italian settlers was extended to the Maltese in some degree, although the newcomers had a strong sense of their British citizenship; 25,000 of their countrymen had served in the British armed forces in World War I and 3,000 had died

in one day at the Battle of Jutland. Sam Deguara, as a case in point, had served on the minesweeper H.M.S. *Egmont* in 1918–19.

Older residents tended to consider the Maltese a tightly knit "nationalistic" group but many of the new arrivals took initiatives to identify with the wider community; and they could be harsh on suspected opportunists, as indicated by the story of a visit by Dr. Charles Mattei in 1933.4

Dr. Mattei, Maltese, a former A.I.F. Lieut. Colonel had been 40 years in Australia. He had been Resident Medical Officer of Rosemount General Hospital in Brisbane from 1922 to 1927, a medical officer with the Tasmanian Bushmen in the Boer War and resident magistrate of Wyndham, Western Australia. Prior to World War I the Maltese Government had commissioned him to investigate immigration to British Columbia. His brother was chairman of the Mt. Zeehan Silver Mining Company in Tasmania (which closed in 1922) where 300 of the 900 employees had been Maltese.

In 1933, Dr. Mattei was travelling to form a Maltese-Australian Association in company with Mr. C. Parnis, editor of the *Maltese Advocate*. The paper was printed in Brisbane. Joe Vella (Andrew's son) remembers it and Parnis well. Some local Maltese money was invested in the journal but it lasted only a few years.

By coincidence about 60 settlers attended a meeting at Habana to form a Maltese Farmers' and Settlers' Association. Jack Camilleri was chairman and Dr. Mattei's proposal for a Maltese-Australian Association was discussed. It was a lively meeting. Ulterior motives were alleged and opponents of the proposal maintained that Maltese already got on well with their neighbours. Nevertheless a Maltese-Australian Association Branch was formed with C. Vella as local representative.

Dr. Mattei appears not to have understood the local Maltese. Parnis compounded his difficulties by appointing an Italian, who could not understand Maltese, to represent him in the district. At a civic welcome only three of Mackay district's 400 Maltese turned up and only 10 others.<sup>5</sup>

A.G. Frendo said the visitors were not truly representative of the Maltese and claimed Dr. Mattei made his move only when appointment of a Maltese High Commissioner was being considered.<sup>6</sup>

Andrew Frendo sold vehicles and machinery for Williams Agencies in his early years at Mackay and later joined with Paul Deguara (son of the Charlie Deguaras) and Fred Lapsley to establish Frendeley Motors, the name having been formed by combining part of each of their names. Paul Deguara subsequently founded the Carlisle Group of Companies at Mackay.

#### The Italians

The first major group of Italian plantation labourers, numbering about 320, arrived in Townsville on the *Jumna* in late 1891; 69 went on to Bundaberg.

They were not penniless migrants. Some were reasonably well off and irked their new employers by leaving for better jobs. Most were ambitious to become farmers and worked hard. At Bundaberg, Angus Gibson of Bingera spoke highly of them.<sup>7</sup>

At Habana prior to August 1891, Long and Robertson were corresponding with the Government on a proposal by Mr. A. Morandy of New Italy (later named Casino) in New South Wales to bring in Italians under the 1882 Immigration Act. The immigrants would work for 15/- a week and later acquire farms. The Government agreed and

Long and Robertson appointed Holm and Co. of Naples as their agents; 16 single and two married labourers and two children were provided with passages on payment of fees by Long and Robertson of £36/1/9d.8

Morandy's connection with Mackay district was not a happy one. In a letter dated 30th September 1891 he said he had been encouraged by Mackay planters to bring in Italians who wanted to learn sugar work first and later become farmers. When he and three others arrived from New Italy they were reviled and could not secure land. They had to work as labourers for 15/– a week and damper. He claimed anti-Italian public opinion stopped planters from leasing land.

The 1891 arrivals settled successfully in the North but no notable settlement occurred at Mackay before 1925. The only Italian name appearing on Farleigh books

between 1912 and 1916 is Paulo Fenoglio of River Estate.

Tighter laws of entry to the United States after World War I directed interest to Australia. Pietro (Peter) Aprile, father of present Farleigh director Vince Aprile, was one migrant affected. He was in the U.S.A. (and Canada for a short time) working on a U.S.-Canadian rail link between 1904 and 1914. He considered joining the U.S. Army but family affairs took him back to Italy and he served in the Italian Army during World War I.

Many years later, together with a small handful of his fellow countrymen at Mackay, he was awarded a medal and citation sanctioned by the President of Italy for his part in one of the celebrated Italian military actions of that war — the Vittorio Veneto campaign. He was designated Cavaliere dell-ordine di Vittorio Veneto. The crux of that campaign was the final battle at Piave.

Service with the U.S. forces would have entitled him to become a U.S. citizen after the war but this was denied him by more stringent immigration laws so he decided to come to Australia and disembarked at Sydney on 15th January 1925.

He left for Queensland by rail, crossed the flooded Burdekin River by boat and arrived at Ingham on 6th February. He worked at scrub clearing until June and decided to come to Mackay. In August, at Dumbleton, in partnership with G. Sturiale, D. Vitulano and a Mr. Padurano, he bought a farm from Pioneer Farms Ltd. They dealt with solicitors Gorton and Hartley, then believed to be members of the company. Pietro's wife and three children, Vince and his brother and sister, came out in June 1934.

Pietro Aprile recalled Bernardo Gatti and Giovanni Corino as the only other Italians supplying Farleigh in 1925. The Gatti farm was in the heart of Farleigh-Ashburton country. He sold it to Mick Griffin in 1932 and bought another farm near Coningsby. G. Corino's original farm, also at Ashburton, is now owned by Farleigh director C. Zahra. B. Gatti had come to Ingham about 1906, become naturalised and returned to Italy in 1912. He returned to Ingham with his wife in 1921 and came to Mackay in August 1925.

Other Italian suppliers up to 1929 were:

1926: G. Corino became an original Farleigh Co-operative Association member.

1927: Ceresa and Fossa, Sub. 4 and 6 of Por. 23 Bassett; G. Letirzia Por. 1360 Mt. Ossa (bought from A.L. Schmidtke); Ravizza and Co. and Rostirolla and Co., Silent Grove. (Silent Grove farms were assigned to Racecourse but supplied Farleigh in 1927 by special arrangement.)

1928: Corino and Sons, P. Galletti, Gandini Bros., Grasso and Melano, Massarano

and Castagnone, Rovelli and Rota, Ventura and Co. (sold to Goli and Co.), Zanesco and Cunial, G. Corsaro.

1929: Goli and Co. (sold to B. Gatti 1932), M. Caracciolo, R. Cavallaro.

A 1926 incident (previously related) when the A.W.U. banned T.J. Wilson partly because he allegedly sold land to an Italian, probably refers to a sale of a Coningsby subdivision to a Mr. Vella, a Maltese. A.W.U. members objected to handling Italian grown cane at Plane Creek in late 1925 and bans were applied in 1926. Bans at Racecourse involved a farmer named Begozzi. Finally North Eton and Racecourse unionists dropped the bans.<sup>9</sup>

A ban on Ravizza and Co. stirred local Italians to have the question of Italian acceptance cleared up and a Mr. Carpisani organised a meeting in July 1926. Carpisani spoke good English, was always well dressed and owned a car. He seems to have been a general "fixit man" for the new arrivals. Predictably his general image earned him the nickname of "the Count". (A man named Gabellini is believed to have been the only Italian taxi driver in those days. In his spare time, for a fee, he would take migrants to inspect farms they were considering buying.)

At the July meeting, held in Wills Hotel, a resolution seeking action to remove the bans was sent to Commonwealth and State Governments, the Italian Consul, local members Wm. Forgan Smith and E.B. Swayne (State) and Dr. L.W. Nott (Federal), the British Prime Minister and the Italian Prime Minister.<sup>10</sup>

A few days later, instructed from Rome, Commotore Antonio Grossadi, Royal Consul General for Italy, arrived at Mackay. Among the local group which met him were Pietro Aprile and his partners D. Vitulano and G. Sturiale, G. Ceresa, B. Gatti and Ravizza and his partners. The Commotore told Bernardo Gatti he could do nothing for him as Gatti was a naturalised British subject.

A few days earlier, Labor Premier W. McCormack had condemned the A.W.U. bans, probably making it easier for the Commotore, who proved to be a good diplomat. He said he found no serious community ill will against Italians at Mackay.<sup>11</sup>

Prejudice tended to remain, complicated to a limited extent by regional differences surviving from the old country. By the end of World War II, the extent to which old tensions had passed is illustrated by an election of Junior Farmers' officers at Calen in the 1950's. Raymond Senini (grandson of an Italian settler of last century), Gary Comelli and Colin Zamparutti filled the executive positions at a meeting, the roll call of which was, apart from these three, filled with Anglo-Celtic names.

A. (Tony) Gaiotti who settled at Calen in 1939 was later awarded a medal and commendation from the Italian Government recognising him as having been an exemplary Italian migrant.

#### The Russians

Farleigh's smallest ethnic group was part of a small wave of Russian settlers who began to arrive in Queensland before World War I and continued to trickle in afterwards.

Some came from Siberia, via China. They were not refugees nor displaced persons. They had heard Australia was a land of opportunity and general recollections are that they did not consider migrating anywhere else. They were all able to pay their fares.

Those who came through China worked there before finally setting out for Australia. The men folk usually left first to establish basic security and then brought

out their women folk and families. Farleigh farmer John Sologinkin recalls that one of his sisters had been born in Siberia and two in China. John was born while his father Simon was working on the Rockhampton-St. Lawrence railway in 1921.

Simon was a Russian cavalry man for six years. His unit was handling civil unrest in Chinese border regions. The operation was more to control bandits and robbery than a full scale military engagement. This was the period of the Russian revolution and when the time came to go home, Simon decided to head for Australia.

A group of Russian immigrants worked on the St. Lawrence section of the North Coast railway. Some had their families with them and children, like John, were born at the work sites. Simon Sologinkin worked as a diver on the St. Lawrence railway bridge. Railways throughout the world were ready starting points for migrants making a start in a new country.

The Russians could neither read, write nor speak English when they arrived, yet they mixed well with the Australians. They were physically tough with a great capacity for work. One of Farleigh's Barcoo area settlers discussing this point on a crisp sunny June morning remarked, probably with the rigours of a Russian winter in mind, "with a winter like this anyone could work". Harsh winters and loss of children from diseases such as diptheria seem to have been significant reasons for decisions to emigrate.

John Kochevatkin and his brother Alex came to Australia about 1911–12. They worked at Gympie and then at Fairymead. Alex had been a corporal in the Russian army and John a locomotive engineer on the Trans-Siberian railway on a branch which ran into Manchuria.

At Fairymead, they and Sergy Cheremisen met S.J. (Stan) Axam. Later at Farleigh he helped establish them on three Farleigh Estate subdivisions near the mill. Alex's family remained there for many years until they sold to the Vella family. John Kotchevatkin and Sergy Cheremisen separated. The former settled at Habana close to George Krisin and Cheremisen shifted to Barcoo.

George Krisin also worked at Bundaberg before he came north. In 1913 he had served a term in the army of the Czar. His people owned a block of land far too small to support a growing family so he decided to leave for Australia. Their limited knowledge of the southern continent led them to believe that he ran a grave risk of being eaten by Aboriginals and they were most distressed at his decision. His daughter, now Mrs. Madge Crear, still on a Farleigh farm in the Habana area, was born in Russia in 1912. Her father would often quip, as an old man, that he had survived being eaten all these years. He lived to be more than 90 years old. Farleigh Chairman of Directors, Ernest Evans, by this time a State Cabinet Minister, would refer to him as "one of my great old mates".

Sologinkin is the only Russian name now on the Farleigh list of suppliers. Five Russians settled at Barcoo in 1923-24 — Simon Sologinkin, Sergy Cheremisen, Zaha (Harry) Klevenick, Dick Lomakin and Con Ischenko. Harry Klevenick was remembered as the first of the Russians to own a motor car — a "Chev 4" purchased from Williams Agencies, Mackay.

Both John Sologinkin and Mrs. Crear declare that the Russian families experienced none of the opposition with which some of the older Australian community greeted the early Italian settlers — and to a lesser extent the Maltese. The Russians enjoyed an excellent neighbourly relationship with Edward Denman and his sons at Etowrie,

helped along by the fact that the Denmans had the only phone in the area. The Barcoo group loaded all their cane at Denman's siding until the mill ran a line to Barcoo. The official Farleigh name of the siding they then used is today The Russians.

The group settled in well. The good humour with which they coped with occasional language problems won them good will and their good neighbourly attitudes and great capacity for work earned them respect. None of them had any wish to leave Australia except John Kotchevatkin's son Sid. He headed for the Northern Territory and bought a Cletrac tractor with which he worked on road jobs. He returned to Russia about 1929 and became an engineer on railways.

His relatives in Australia believed for a time he had been killed in World War II but after several years, word arrived saying he was safe. He then became concerned about the security of his sisters. Social security in Russia by this time was good but from his recollections of the 1920's, he fancied it might be minimal in Australia. He is still in Russia. Under a retirement scheme he enjoys a summer and winter residence and is able to indulge a liking for hunting.

Some of the families of the first settlers are showing a renewed interest in recontacting relatives and friends of their families in Russia. A younger generation is taking advantage of travel tours to see for themselves the land of their grandparents.

<sup>1.</sup> M.P.A. minutes courtesy M.H.S.; The Sugar Industry in Queensland by Ling Roth, courtesy Q.P.L.

<sup>2.</sup> T.O. 4-8-1883.

<sup>3.</sup> M.P.A. minutes 18-8-1882 and 26-8-1884.

<sup>4.</sup> D.M. 13-11-1933.

<sup>5.</sup> D.M. 22-11-1933.

<sup>6.</sup> D.M. 23-11-1933.

<sup>7.</sup> M.M. 17-12-1891; M.S. 20-1-1892; M.M. 28-1-1892.

<sup>8.</sup> M.M. 25-8-1891.

<sup>9.</sup> D.M. 29-6, 23-7, 27-7, 3-8, 5-8-1926.

<sup>10.</sup> D.M. 27-7-1926.

<sup>11.</sup> D.M. 13-8-1926.

## Part forty-eight

# **TURBULENT YEARS**

The North Coast delivered 47,482 tons of cane out of 119,061 tons crushed in 1927. The new farmers' directorate endeavoured to put to rest some of the old miller-grower contention. Daily returns of cane analyses were sent to individual suppliers in 1926. Manager Alex McKinnon believed Farleigh was the first mill to do this.

Old problems persisted. The mill handled 5,000 tons of cane a week comfortably but in the early weeks of the 1927 season, supplies averaged only 3,671 tons. McKinnon was particularly irked by Racecourse Silent Grove growers who were supplying Farleigh by special arrangement. They supplied no cane in the first month. He complained in his annual report. "I don't think a mill this size can pay on 3,600 tons a week."

At the beginning of 1927 the Association had trouble in finding a banker. The Commonwealth Bank head office took an unacceptably long time to answer Farleigh's request for a permanent berth. Of the other banks only the National Bank of Australasia Ltd. was interested. Local manager, W.F. Eather, checked with the liquidator and in spite of the confusion surrounding the Homebush-Oakenden-North Coast exchange and obvious weaknesses in the mill, strongly recommended taking the Farleigh account. It has remained with the National ever since.

Poor extraction was the main milling problem and a Walkers Ltd. 6 ft. mill with engine and gearing, costing £13,200, was added at No. 4 position for the 1928 crushing. Barbat and Sons, Mackay, installed the plant for £3,480. In 1928 the weekly crushing rate almost reached 5,000 tons but the crop was down to 92,980 tons. The mill's profit was only £232. The mill store profit was £870 and the bakery £200. In spite of the low figures, three shillings of the liquidator's four shillings levy was returned. "Levy shares" were issued against the balance. The improved crushing rate emphasised the obsolescence of the evaporating plant and three effets of 9,000 sq. ft. heating surface and a 15 ton vacuum pan were bought from Walkers. Purchase and installation cost £20,631.

The 1929 results were worse — 71,422 tons crushed for a net profit of £71. Changes had to be made. Alex McKinnon's engagement was as "mill" manager, not "general" manager. Secretary W. Christoe was virtually office manager while Mulherin's role was something akin to managing director. McKinnon did not attend board meetings and he was frequently irked by lack of definition of his responsibilities.

It was announced in November 1929 that Farleigh would call applications for a general manager and immediately T.A. Powell contacted John Smith, recently resigned from the C.S.R. Company, where he had been inspector of sugar properties. He had also been Powell's colleague on the Central Sugar Cane Prices Board as miller's representative. Smith got the job at £1,000 a year from 47 applications, initially for a three year term (without a contract) starting from February 1930.

Smith understood the local pressures which at that time could influence decisions in farmer directed mills. The fact did not escape him that all Farleigh's seven directors retired annually.

He believed it his duty to educate his growers to think as millers. He knew the redoutable old C.S.R. baiter Philip Kirwan commanded local support. He knew that a latent anti-miller sentiment in the district would die hard.

Smith virtually made it a condition of his acceptance that he install his own senior staff. He recruited former C.S.R. Company colleagues — A.G. (Ben) Hall as engineer, D.L. (Lindsay) McBryde chemist and E. (Ted) Freeman cane inspector. Philip Kirwan and Farleigh's diehard grower militants were aghast.

Smith understood Mulherin's difficulty in having to direct a mill whose new owners had habitually fought their miller. He was adamant that for Farleigh to survive, its owners had to behave like millers although he understood that as Farleigh was a fully co-operative venture, he would have a difficult task steering his Association in uncharted corporate seas.

Smith agreed with the principle that if possible, the annual liquidator's levy should be returned to growers at the end of the season in which it was struck but maintained that the only way to do this was to run a profitable mill. If the growers wanted their money back they had to earn it. He had an early opportunity to make a public impact on his farmers. Two months after his arrival 50 growers, reflecting to some extent gloom at the poor 1929 result and partly influenced by "big mill" sentiment still prevailing in the district, requisitioned for a general meeting to discuss selling Farleigh's crop to Racecourse, Marian or Pleystowe. The meeting was held on 4th April 1930, attended by 180 farmers.

Smith recommended against selling the crop and outlined an improved scheme for payment of the debt to the old Company's liquidator. His recommendations were accepted unanimously on the motion of T.G. Mulherin and Ernest Evans. On the same day Farleigh received a take-over offer from Amalgamated Sugar Mills (Pleystowe), which envisaged closing the mill. This was rejected and at the annual meeting on 27th June. Smith commented on the matter in detail. He first made gracious reference to his predecessors, pointing out that the poor 1929 year was due, partly at least, to financial and seasonal circumstances beyond their control. He believed, but he did not say so, that the new co-operative had started with the wrong staff structure.

He dismissed the Pleystowe proposal as unacceptable, observing that "with the possibility of Farleigh drifting on to the rocks, the time may have seemed opportune (to Pleystowe) to try and pick up a soft snap". He said Farleigh had "great potentialities" and advised growers not to sacrifice their co-operative enterprise. His board approved and most growers approved. He then gave his growers a caning for delivering too much burnt and badly cleaned cane. His board approved of that too, but the rocks of mill area politics were close to the surface.

The matter of cane quality was aggravated by what came to be called the "Uba question". Uba was a tough, vigorous growing, poor milling variety and penalties were applied to growers who supplied it. Some, predictably including Philip Kirwan, claimed farms on poor soils needed the variety although Smith was quick to point out that some of the loudest complainants had soils capable of growing better milling canes. Uba milling trials were held at Farleigh in 1931. Smith was charged with rigging the trials in spite of the fact that the chemist member of the Central Board, James



Executive Staff 1930-34: A.G. (Ben) Hall (chief engineer), W. (Bill) Christoe (secretary), E. (Ted) Freeman (chief cane inspector), D.L. (Lindsay) McBryde (chief chemist). Photo: Farleigh Mill.

MacGibbon was present. He spiritedly defended his officers saying they were highly trained C.S.R. men of unimpeachable integrity.

The "Uba question" demonstrated three significant aspects of mill area politics which would finally have to be accommodated if Farleigh were to achieve stability. T.G. Mulherin and John Smith, with Philip Kirwan (representing the growers) visited Fairymead where progress had been made in handling the cane. Smith was opposed to the variety. Kirwan wanted Farleigh to accept it. Mulherin had the difficult task of reconciling almost unanswerable technological objections with mill area politics.

"We were supposed to reach a concensus and make a report", he later called. "We had no hope of agreeing so we came back with three reports".

When P.O.J. varieties presented milling problems in 1935, the directors decided against similar milling trials, partly on the grounds that they would rekindle the divisiveness caused by the Uba trials.

Meetings in the thirties were long and vigorous. Philip Kirwan and others spoke at length until finally time limits had to be applied. One of the keenest critics of mill affairs was T.G. Mulherin's brother "Chook". (Many growers did not know his initial "H" stood for Henry.) Loading allowances, extraneous matter, burning restrictions, over production, the plight of small farmers, mill work, repayment of "levy shares" and an endless list of domestic Association matters were debated by an enthusiastic bunch of oratorial extroverts; and it was all printed.

The impression developed that Farleigh was in a chronic state of turmoil. However through it all a stamp of professionalism emerged and steady progress became apparent.

Turmoil however, there was. In 1934, T.G. Mulherin resigned the chair and his seat on the board. He had sold his farm to become a life assurance company representative. George Farquhar (sen.) well built, powerful and widely respected, filled the vacancy. His sound common sense and spark of humour often defused a tense situation. R.I. Robinson defeated W.B. Fordyce for the chair. Fordyce was elected chairman the following year (1935).

That year J.J. Hand was nominated in conformity with an idea that tended to develop that the chair should be filled by rotation. Ernest Evans was known to have wanted the job but when he knew he did not have the numbers, declined nomination.

Evans had come to the district in 1928 and settled at Nindaroo. He became a Farleigh Association member on 21st June 1928 and on 29th July 1929 was elected to the board when J.B. Kelly resigned. He became a Pioneer Shire Councillor in 1930 and in 1934 contested the Shire chairmanship against sitting chairman D.L. Ross. Ross won but was declared ineligible on residential grounds following a protest lodged by P.J. McDermott of Kolijo. Evans became chairman.

W.B. Fordyce died in Brisbane while on mill business, in March 1936 and Evans acted as chairman and was confirmed in the position after the annual meeting on 23rd April. That annual meeting saw four new members: T.G. Mulherin (who had bought a Cameron's Pocket farm and was again eligible), Philip Kirwan (now a miller after a lifetime of grower militancy), P.J. McDermott and F.J.E. Holt. George Winton, Bob Robinson and Noel Manning were the casualties. Holt had alleged that incorrect laboratory work during 1935 had adversely affected growers' cane pays and persisted with his criticism after he joined the board. He had been a sugar chemist and had been a critic of mill work as early as 1926. Smith claimed Holt was not abreast of latest developments.

The board finally secured former C.S.R. Company chemist N.M. Thomas to conduct a chemical audit of the 1935 figures. His report, delivered on 30th October 1936, vindicated Farleigh chemist J.S. Pollard, apart from a minor discrepancy, and found Holt's claims not valid. The *Daily Mercury* published it in full (as it had published most of the argument preceding it) on 9th November 1936. It occupied seven full columns of broadsheet.

Jim Pollard, a World War I artillery man and formerly chief chemist at Racecourse, had succeeded Lindsay McBryde in 1934. The decision to replace McBryde, who had been ill the previous year, had not been an easy one, particularly for W.B. Fordyce whose years at Richmond had meant a close association with the McBryde family.

McBryde had developed a rapport with his growers. Many realised that a maturity testing programme he had introduced, significantly improved their mill pays. Fairymead had earlier done similar work, probably when McBryde was there, but McBryde generally has received industry credit for its introduction on a wide scale. He received support from Dr. H.W. Kerr, then at the beginning of a notable career as a sugar technologist. McBryde earned the President's Medal at the third annual conference of the Queensland Society of Sugar Cane Technologists at Mackay in 1932, for a paper on the subject.

He induced his growers to direct better farming techniques towards improving

harvested cane quality. He put his rapport with cane farmers to good use when he was appointed to control the Mackay Sugar Experiment Station, recently re-located at Te Kowai.

C.W. (Colin) Waddell, later prominent as a technologist with the Queensland Cane Growers' Council was appointed to the vacancy on 10th February 1934 but he was in the Philippines at the time and wired nine days later that he could not take up the appointment. J.S. Pollard was then appointed. J. Morison signed the chemist's report to the annual meeting in 1934. S.J. (Stan) Fevre replaced A.G. Hall as chief engineer on a board minute dated 10th February. He had come from the Government owned Chillagoe Smelting Works and had been at Mulgrave before that.

The 1936 annual meeting was vigorous and the board changes were the most extensive in Farleigh's history but the day's events had their comic relief. George Winton had canvassed actively and believed that, on verbal promises, he had enough support to be returned. He was visibly distressed at the count but he was an ebullient fellow. He thanked those who had supported him and added: "for the rest of you, well I've never met so many b . . . . . liars in my life".

The remaining three years of the decade saw steady progress. General meetings were still spirited but Ernest Evans shortened and refined them. Growers realised that many of the problems of the period, stemming largely from poor prices and overproduction, were clearly beyond the control of directors and management. Reports and balance sheets were still strenuously challenged, but to an increasing number of growers the mill was becoming more than just a place to have a crop treated. Confidence and pride of ownership developed.

Evans began to look to the day when the mill would crush 10,000 tons of cane in a normal week. By 1939 it seemed within reach but its permanent achievement was to prove elusive. By the end of 1940 he had been Pioneer Shire chairman for more than six years and Farleigh chairman for more than four. With characteristic confidence he looked ahead to a long tenure of both jobs.

His Farleigh manager approved his long term aims and respected his drive and business capacity. As a C.S.R. trained professional, Smith respected the Association's lines of command but when Farleigh affairs interlocked with his various sugar related public interests, his temperament did not make him accept easily the subordinate role of executive officer to Evans as arbiter of all policies. Many regarded Smith as the voice of Farleigh, a situation which a man of Evans' temperament could not have liked.

On major issues each backed the other in public. In private a certain incompatibility existed, as indeed it persisted between Mulherin and Smith and to a lesser degree between Mulherin and Evans. Farleigh board had no deputy chairman and for many years Mulherin was regarded as first among equals of the other six. It was Farleigh's good fortune and a credit to all three that the enterprise to which each in his own way was deeply committed did not suffer from occasional tensions which inevitably developed. The rest of this history could have been greatly different.

Early in September 1940, Smith was admitted to Lister Hospital seriously ill. On 17th October a verbal suggestion that he should apply for extended leave without pay was made, which he asked should be put in writing. A letter was written, stating in part that the directors had no wish to end his engagement and repeated the leave suggestion.

Smith replied through secretary A.P. Bowerman that he would not resign in writing.

He said he had decided to cut loose from the Association and refused to discuss the matter further. The board accepted this as resignation dating from 30th November 1940 "with very much regret having regard to the very excellent services rendered by you to the Association". Subdued tensions obviously had finally bubbled to the surface. It was a sad episode. The Association's latter day stability has been in substantial part a legacy of the teamwork these men, incompatible in some ways, had contrived to keep intact during a turbulent decade.

Smith had become guide, philosopher and friend to many struggling growers. He could be tough in controversy but man to man his manner, like his dress, was impeccably correct. To a grower in need of advice he was invariably gracious and uncondescending. Many growers took his side and a testimonial fund was begun for him. The board decided to circularise growers with the full correspondence without comment. Inevitably it attracted wide district coverage. It was decided also to call growers' meetings, ostensibly to discuss general affairs but really to explain the board's position.

Youthful Archie Sivyer attended one of the meetings, sensed the reason and castigated the directorate. He, at any rate, regarded Smith as the saviour of Farleigh. Word travels fast in the interplay of mill area politics. Soon afterwards Sivyer was leaving from a visit to Lister Hospital. Smith was still an inmate. Many years later he recalled: "Mrs. Smith met me and told me her husband wished to see me. I went in and he greeted me warmly. 'Archie', he said, 'I want to thank you for what you did for me the other night' ".

Farleigh people argued about the Smith era for years, usually from fixed positions. The standing of Ernie Evans and Tom Mulherin continued to grow. Smith had his detractors but in the minds of the majority his image never diminished. One grower who had attended most if not all meetings of that turbulent decade aptly reviewed the period: "They all played their part. We (the farmers) played our part too. When Smith came after '29 we were in a bit of a mess. By the time the war came, Farleigh was Farleigh".

John Smith continued for a time as mill owners' representative on the Sugar Experiment Stations Advisory Board. He split his retirement years between Mackay and Sydney. His eyesight, which had begun to fail at the time of his 1940 illness, grew worse. He died in October 1947.

### Part forty-nine

# DEPRESSION AND WAR

Farleigh's run up to a target of 10,000 tons crushed in a week occurred during disturbing years, economic depression, overproduction and war. In 1923 the Bruce-Page Federal Government abandoned control of the industry and the Queensland Sugar Board was set up with W.J. Short, then General Manager of the Government Bureau of Central Mills as Chairman. The price per ton was reduced from £30/6/8d. to £27 and from 6 pence to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  pence per lb. in the shops.

Surplus sugar for export appeared in 1924 and by 1929 with world wide financial depression closing in, the dilution of the home price by low export prices was serious. In 1929 a "peak year" scheme was devised, restricting each mill to its best year's output since 1915. Additional sugar would be placed in a pool which would attract "nett export value". During the thirties the term "pool" became synonomous with very low prices and industry depression.

The Australian Sugar Journal recorded that the "peak year" suggestion met with general acceptance but that details could not easily be ironed out and "it was decided to hand over the whole perplexing responsibility to the Central Sugar Cane Prices Board". The "peak year" for each mill was fixed by the Sugar Board. Farleigh's peak was 16,993 tons in a Queensland total of 611,000.

Consumers agitated for a lower price and removal of the embargo on imports. In 1930 after the "Gunn enquiry" the Scullin Federal Government allowed both the embargo and the 4½ pence a pound to continue for the remaining two years of the Commonwealth-State sugar agreement. The Lyons Nationalist Government swept to power in December 1931 and Joseph Lyons bluntly declared the sugar price must be cut. Acting Attorney General Senator A.J. McLachlan negotiated with the industry and the State Government. The Queenslanders resisted cuts but the price was reduced to £23 a ton and to four pence a pound late in 1932.

John Smith entered newspaper controversy on the issue and took the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* to task for not printing his views. West Australian journalist and senator, Sir Hal Colebatch, supported a price drop and was a leading opponent of the embargo, although sugar was only one of 98 items so protected. He claimed the Hughes price of £30/6/8d. had pushed up land values and wages. He also drove a significant wedge among regional sugar interests by claiming it had led to expansion on to poorer lands, as at Mackay, rather than to vacant fertile lands in the North.

The West Australian Government, with retention of its gold bonus in mind, supported Queensland. The Victorian Chamber of Manufacturers which had sympathised with W.T. Paget on Melanesian repatriation in 1902, in conformity with its protectionist policy, declared itself in August 1932 "totally opposed to any steps being taken by the Government which would in any way jeopardise the sugar industry in Queensland".

The Central Sugar Cane Prices Board had begun its own restrictive measures in 1927

by reviewing "cane assignments". The first Regulation of Cane Prices Act in 1915 had provided that lands supplying a particular mill be permanently "assigned" to that mill. The assignment applied to the whole property description, not just to the part supplying cane. It was designed to regularise harvest and transport and to give growers security in crop disposal. It was not then a production control measure. From the beginning the Central Board found it had to contend with anomalies and assignment "trafficking".

In 1925 the Central Board announced that no new lands would be assigned and existing assigned areas would not be increased. In 1927 assignments were restricted to land on which accepted practices of cane cultivation were carried out. Again the Board had to contend with a crop of new anomalies and "grey areas".

"Peaks" and "assignments" finally became twin cornerstones of sugar industry production controls, but in the beginning they were only partly successful. Applied together they tended to be counter productive. Sugar industry politics tended to ensure that tonnages and areas were set at upward limits and mills and growers always had a ready case to show that their individual allocations were too low.

Initially mills were obliged to take all suitable cane from assigned lands. Many growers guessed farm peaks would come, based perhaps on a "peak year" for farms. They risked overproduction and aimed at the maximum production from their assigned lands, contributing to a permanent surplus to the Australian market. This became No. 2 Pool sugar. The best the restrictive measure could hope to achieve was to keep No. 2 Pool within bearable limits.

The 1933 Farleigh Local Cane Prices Board Award contained special No. 2 Pool provisions. In 1935 John Smith told his growers the pooling arrangements were reasonably fair. Many growers felt otherwise but accepted Smith's word that they were probably as fair as could be in an imperfect situation. A directors' decision on 19th October 1935 indicates how imperfect the arrangements were. It was decided to crush "until Christmas Eve provided satisfactory financial arrangements can be made and that all suppliers be urged to supply their proportion of excess production so that all share in the loss which will occur in manufacture". Asking 353 farmers to share a loss voluntarily was asking a lot, even in the festive season.

On another occasion when a growers' meeting decided in principle to restrict production, many did not slow down, causing one disillusioned grower at a subsequent meeting to declare, "when gentlemen's agreements like these are made gentlemen get hurt most".

The application and effect of production controls added an explosive mix to the volatility of Farleigh meetings. The heat of debate was aggravated by small new assignments allocated from an extra 1,200 acres assigned to the mill in 1931. This had been the subject of an application to the Central Board before the "peak year" scheme applied, to rectify an area anomaly left from the Homebush–North Coast exchange. Most of the new assignments were from five to 15 acres. (In 1942 there were almost 50 such assignments on the North Coast and 20 at Farleigh.) The intention in part, was to provide a small base of security to struggling farmers. Restricting cane to the areas assigned required firm disciplines and later the Central Board had to adjudicate on strident claims for them to be built up into living areas.

By 1940 Farleigh was drawing cane from 13 sidings extended over 50 miles of Government line: Geeberga, Narpi, Buthurra, Mt. Ossa, Clanside, Mt. Pelion, Kolijo,

Calen, Pindi Pindi, Wagoora, Yalbaroo, Cathu and Elaroo. The mill area then had a spread of 70 miles measured from Shoal Point to the mill and out again to Elaroo. Many of the North Coast small areas were tucked away in Cameron's Pocket, Rise and Shine, Cathu back country and the O'Connell River, up to 11 miles from sidings. A lot of cane was hauled from four or five miles. "Chook" Mulherin became chairman of the Farleigh Small Growers' Committee. Their battle for survival was acute and Mulherin's advocacy on their behalf correspondingly vigorous.

By 1931 world prices were, as the *Mercury* put it, "so low that sugar producing countries were confronted with the alternative of a mutual pooling scheme or ruination. The situation was desperate and taxed the best brains of the sugar world". The Chadbourne scheme was the outcome.

Thomas Lincoln Chadbourne, a New York lawyer with extensive sugar interests, decided in 1930 to try to secure market stabilisation. In May 1931 his efforts led to an agreement among producers, who in turn secured implementing legislation from their respective Governments. Its task was to liquidate four million tons of surplus stocks being held in addition to three million tons of normal carry-over stocks. The scheme aided by poor weather had an immediate stabilising effect but measures agreed to by signatories were drastic. In Java, 62 of the Island's 178 mills planted no cane in 1932.

Production in the British Commonwealth and the U.S.A. neutralised the value of many of the Chadbourne restrictions but the agreement had a stabilising effect until it expired in October 1935. Australia was not a Chadbourne signatory. The Ottawa agreements covering British Commonwealth trade preferences were to run from 1932 to 1937 and Australia looked to this for market protection. When Chadbourne signatories failed to reach a further agreement they decided to ask the U.K. Government to call a world sugar conference.

In an international agreement signed in May 1937, Australia received an export quota of 400,000 tons. In 1938 a Royal Commission on "Sugar Peaks and Cognate Matters" resulted in the total of Queensland mill peaks being increased to 737,000 tons of sugar in 1939. Farleigh's peak was increased to 23,000 tons.

Between 1926 and 1937 the price Farleigh received for sugar had fallen from £24/10/10d. to £15/14/7d., almost 36 per cent. Mill costs had dropped from £6/17/- a ton to £4/6/- a ton or more than 37 per cent. John Smith recalled the Amalgamated Sugar Mills take-over offer in 1930 when "it was pointed out on behalf of the would be purchasers that a co-operative mill could not carry on without levying its growers if the price of raw sugar fell below £18 a ton. We weathered the storm in 1936 when the price . . . . . dropped to £14/10/2d. and we will get through again this time", he said, "although our sugar price will probably be even lower as a result of our increased proportion of excess sugar".

That was in April 1939. In April 1940, he said, after the record 1939 season of 218,908 tons, "our mill has acquitted itself well". He had gone before he could report on the 1940 season and no manager's report appeared in the 1941 reports and balance sheet.

Ernest Evans was virtually managing director for six months from the time Smith took ill. He declined extra remuneration but was voted 200 guineas by shareholders at the 1941 annual meeting. Philip Kirwan wanted him to stay in control during 1941. Bob Robinson endorsed Kirwan's confidence in Evans but he had been a director when Farleigh operated without a fully accredited manager in 1926–29 and urged that one be

appointed. Evans believed he had done a good job but he wanted a professional manager. He said "he felt himself unqualified to assume the responsibility of a full time undertaking". However his vision of a chairman manager relationship did not necessarily conform to customary style.

The post of manager, not general manager, was advertised and a short list of four selected from 20 applicants: P.J. Staunton, a highly regarded chemist who had replaced J.S. Pollard at Racecourse; S.V. Fevre, Farleigh's chief engineer; J.S. Pollard, Farleigh's chief chemist and W.F. Clarke who had been manager at Pleystowe for five years. Bill Clarke had lived at Farleigh when his father Robert was estate manager from 1903 to 1912.

Robert Clarke succeeded J.C. Penny as Pleystowe manager and held the post for 18 years until he retired in 1935. His son succeeded him at Pleystowe. Bill Clarke was an experienced chemist and draughtsman and also had secured a second engineer's ticket. He had trained under J.L. (Jack) Halpin, a renowned engineer who in 1949 was to make a significant report on Farleigh machinery.

Bill Clarke had served at Isis and Fairymead and was in Fiji for three years up to early 1918 where, as well as filling technological posts he had been an overseer of Pacific Islands labourers. Just old enough to enlist, he came home in January 1918 to "join up". His ship rode out the 1918 cyclone off Broadsound. Clarke won the Farleigh job and took up duties on 1st March 1941.

Stan Fevre was regarded by his peers as a good engineer. He served Farleigh well from 1934 to 1944. Jim Pollard gave Farleigh good service for 20 years. Each was given to moments of temperamental volatility. While they were together, elements involving plant, cane quality and erratic railway dependent cane supplies made serene coexistence between engineers and chemists difficult and led to legendary tales of competition between departments.

The fact that the two now served under a manager chosen ahead of them was not an unusual professional situation; but added to it was Ernest Evans' developing individualistic philosophy on policy making and executive roles, a bunch of independently minded farmers and the fact that wartime problems were beginning to bite. The mix of circumstances did not make Clarke's job easy.

Bill Clarke remained until the end of 1942. It had been a difficult year. The crop had dropped to 148,510 tons (from 218,908 in 1939). Wartime restrictions and manpower shortages reduced the scope for plant improvement. Rationalisation of rail transport among local mills gave Farleigh a net increase of railway cane. Fitting cane train schedules into wartime freight and troop train movements at the height of the Japanese invasion scare was not easy. In those years, cane inspector Jack Tucker won a legendary reputation for keeping the mill supplied with cane.

Trains ran hours late and it was practical to load only in daylight. Rail delays meant the Farleigh end crop, which contained up to 90 per cent of variety Co290, had to be crushed without a leavening of more easily milled varieties from the North Coast and this made sugar recovery more difficult. Labour was scarce and the harvest relied heavily on temporary army releases. Coefficient of work throughout the district dropped that year. At Farleigh it was down 2.18 units. The year's profit was only £792.

New cane cutting styles developed. "Stooling" or "bangtailing" replaced the practice of cutting one or two sticks at a time and then slashing the top off while the sticks were still held. Now cutters endeavoured to slice whole stools in an armful,

pivoting the bundle on a hip and dropping it, later to top it where it lay. Knife blades were specially bent and fitted with longer handles.

Cutters' output increased phenomenally but it meant an alarming fall in cane quality. The new style could only be performed satisfactorily in burnt cane. J.S. Pollard that year reported trash, roots, tops and soil at more than twice the level of the previous five year average. Almost all the cane was burnt and the proportion of stale burnt cane was high.

In later years neither Evans nor Mulherin would be drawn to speak critically of management problems of 1941–42. Mulherin always afterwards spoke of W.F. Clarke with respect and kindliness. Clarke went to Fairymead, then served at Cameron's Foundry at Mackay. In 1947 he went to Proserpine where he served as a chemist and draughtsman. He was chief chemist there from 1953 until his retirement in 1965.

His son C.D. Clarke is currently (1983) chief engineer at Farleigh. Colin Clarke began his apprenticeship at Farleigh before his family moved to Proserpine. He was appointed to Farleigh staff as an engineering draughtsman in February 1956. He worked in close harmony with chief engineer B.L. Wright, became Wright's assistant, then deputy chief engineer and succeeded as chief engineer when Wright retired in 1968.

By early 1943 the Association had gained unity and stability in spite of still vigorous general meetings. Old orators like Joe Trevaskis and "Chook" Mulherin had mellowed a little. Philip Kirwan a director since 1936 had to confine his restless probings of the status quo to the very restrictive platform of a chair at the board table. Growers in post-war years began to listen for perceptive remarks and comments from such men as E.A.C. (Lex) Sim, Vince Aprile and occasional verbal explosions from Ned Burdon. When ocean liners were turned into troop ships and the second A.I.F. sailed for the Middle East, many of Ned's colleagues had rated him the toughest digger aboard the *Queen Mary*.

Mulherin and Evans had formed a good working relationship. Each exasperated the other occasionally but they treated such situations with pragmatic forebearance. Board membership was stable. In addition, Evans had found the man he wanted for manager. This was G.W. Shaw then in his twenties with a young family and secretary of Cattle Creek.

Evans was impressed, among other things, with material Shaw had prepared for a Central Sugar Cane Prices Board hearing. He sensed a kindred adventurousness in the younger man and appreciated a fine balance of youthful self assurance and deference to formality and seniority. Evans asked him to apply for the job and on 11th January 1943 nominated him for acceptance from 28 applicants. George Shaw accepted the position as from 8th February 1943.

### Part fifty

# THE ELUSIVE TEN THOUSAND

The thirties and forties were years of special striving — striving to build up small farms; striving against poor prices; against the sun and in the harvest season against the clock, to perform prodigies of manual work; against wartime shortages of manpower and materials; technological striving for farm and factory improvement; striving to get the best from horse teams in an age of advancing mechanisation; striving to utilise the speed of the motor car on extremely rough roads.

Conditions perhaps had been tougher in the twenties and before, but now more goals became more readily attainable for more people. Perhaps a sensing of the new opportunities brought extra vigour to grower participation in Farleigh affairs.

Memories of minor incidents highlight the nature of the years. North Coast directors had breakfast at the mill before meetings. On one occasion a train load of Farleigh growers went to Calen for a meeting instead of the other way round, giving Calen its greatest ever influx of visitors. The meeting was held in Andrew McClanachan's hall.

George Winton, one night, found Alligator Creek in part flood. In those days men wore coats and waistcoats to town. Winton removed his trousers, tucked his coat and shirt tails under his arms and forded the creek with his trousers on his head. George Mahon of Cameron's Pocket, when St. Helens Creek flooded, harnessed his dog to a tub in which mailman Andy Stewart placed the mail, for the dog to tow across. Grower resistance to restrictions on burning cane is highlighted by a story of Bill Abbott throwing a bag of dead snakes at the feet of a cane inspector, exclaiming "now will you give me permission to burn?" Risk of snake bite was always a pretty good excuse for burning.

The fifties brought accelerated mechanisation, many new amenities, better roads and a generation of farmers with remarkable natural mechanical skills. Striving did not stop but it became physically easier Expectations of cash profits were manifested, from 1936 onwards, in calls for redemption of the "levy shares" issued against money retained from the liquidator's levy in 1926, 1928, 1929 and 1930. These shares were regularly traded. Ernest Evans was a substantial buyer at times. Once, when he was criticised for it, he replied that he had been preaching faith in the Association for years and now was backing his own faith in practical fashion.

A crushing target of 10,000 tons a week caught the imagination of growers, management and staff and Evans used it as an effective rallying point. Crushing targets had always been good for generating grower enthusiasm. Soon after his arrival in 1930, John Smith said: "with bearable expenditure the mill will be built up to handle 9,000 tons (in a week)". In fact 9,000 tons was not reached until 1939, the year before he left.

Achievement of 8,000 tons a week in 1935 was a landmark. Record crops of 149,164 and 158,976 tons respectively in 1935 and 1936 were morale boosters. Mill results were

satisfactory (in spite of F.J.E. Holt's 1936 complaints) and in spite of the boardroom upsets of the period, grower confidence strengthened.

After a record crop of 218,908 tons in 1939 and a record best week's crushing of 9,451 tons, Evans confidently declared in 1940, "Our aim is to build the mill up to a capacity of 10,000 tons in an ordinary working week". In 1941 he achieved it but it was not reached again until the record season (244,629 tons) of 1948 and then only on a best week basis.

Mervyn Wright has recalled several occasions when the target rate almost had been reached within a normal working week and then eluded them. "Stan Fevre almost had it one night", he says, "when Jim Pollard stopped some electrical gear to take a measurement. When Jim gave the word to switch on again the switchboard exploded". He remembered watching the liquor tanks, which were set high. When the level rose to within a couple of inches of the top, foam would well up and it was a sign the milling train was pushing the "back end" hard. Occasionally a malfunction in the float control would occur and liquor would cascade down.

When the target was in sight in 1948, B.L. Wright had to improvise to achieve it. "The fan to maintain a draught at the stack broke down", Wright says. "We ran off a 2 inch pipe from the boilers, cut a hole in the steel at the stack and fixed a nozzle at the end of the pipe to provide a steam blast". Mervyn Wright remembers an all pervading roar from the stack which reverberated through the mill for the rest of the week.

The 1943 crop (G.W. Shaw's first), of 114,280 tons, was the smallest for 11 years. Labour difficulties were acute in 1944, with inexperienced men having to be trained on the job; 1945 saw a protracted crushing extending into January. The war was over and Farleigh's temporarily rezoned suppliers were glad to come home; drought in 1946 brought stunted and frosted cane. George Shaw described 1947 as "disastrous". Drought and ratoon stunting disease struck together. Mervyn Wright cryptically commented: "We started on 4th August, beat our peak by a small amount and finished by Melbourne Cup day". The mill managed a small profit of £10,103 but the tonnage of 104,335 was the smallest since 1932.

In spite of difficulties, significant milestones were reached. The face value of "Levy shares" issued against short repayment of the liquidator's levy in 1926, '28, '29 and '30 totalled £64,540. This earned holders 5 per cent interest. In 1944, £30,696 was repaid and the balance (£33,844) redeemed in 1945. Profits had always been returned to the mill and "bonus" shares issued in lieu. The first redemption of these was made in 1945. Farleigh shareholders had been patient, if at times a little noisy for 19 years.

An average weekly rate of 10,262 tons was reached in 1949 and the crop of 261,021 tons was another record. "Best week" figures comfortably exceeded 10,000 tons after that but an average weekly rate of better than 10,000 tons for a whole crushing, a "permanent 10,000", had to wait until 1952. Each year thereafter it was always exceeded and general interest focused on hourly rates.

After the commencement of profit payments in 1945 and the reachievement in 1948, of the elusive 10,000 tons after seven frustrating years, the graph of Farleigh's progress needed a different grid.

While the mill was striving for its "permanent 10,000", a significant crop transformation occurred with the release by the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations of its new "Q" canes. In 1943 and 1944, varieties 1900 (a "noble" cane) and Co290 (a hybrid grass cane) were the major mill area varieties. In 1943 the newly released

"grass" cane Q28 supplied less than one per cent of the crop. In two years it had supplanted Co290 as the area's major variety with 38.73 per cent and by 1948 its percentage had risen to 54.48. Its rise had been fast and so was its fall. It proved very susceptible to ration stunting disease — so much so that many farmers called the disease Q28 disease. By 1951 the proportion was down to 10.067 per cent.

By the mid forties the B.S.E.S. had released Q50. In 1947, Q28 achieved its highest crop proportion (56.30 per cent); Q50 provided a tiny .02 per cent. By the time O28 had dropped to 10 per cent in 1951, Q50 had climbed to 76 per cent. It reached 87 per cent in 1955.

The vigour of the new varieties was surprising, but their stalks did not pack well, since grass canes are more springy and lighter per unit length than the old "noble" varieties. Tram trucks therefore were loaded high to maintain weight and the number of derailments increased. The cane grew so tall that on tram lines servicing areas where long canes had not been common, saplings had to be cut down to let the loco trains through.

Between 1955 and 1960, Q50 declined to 32 per cent; Q58, a brittle good ratooning cane had a brief run of popularity, increasing from five per cent in 1956 to almost 40 per cent in 1960. In that period the B.S.E.S. gave Mackay district its best ever performer. This was NCo310. Its percentage rose slowly to 6.3 per cent during the four seasons 1957 to '60; then to almost 24 in 1963, 42 in 1970, 52 in 1974, 62 in 1975, 69 in 1978, 72 in 1979 and 73 per cent in 1980. In 1980 the next most popular variety was Q102 with only 9.78 per cent of the crop. (A cloud — in 1983 — hangs over NCo310 following discovery of Fiji disease in Mackay district in early 1981. The variety was completely phased out of Bundaberg mill areas because of susceptibility to the disease.)

Ernest Evans had an intuitive feel for a business target. He was a practical visionary who planned boldly. Shaw was not a trained technologist. He was an accountant and a professional administrator. He had lived at close quarters with a vigorous farming community based at Finch Hatton. He understood farmers.

Under these two, Farleigh invested boldly in new equipment while Shaw squeezed astonishing levels of performance out of old plant. It was a challenging and often trying policy for a mill engineer to implement and Farleigh must be rated lucky that for 24 formative years they had a chief engineer who successfully handled many hard technological problems. This was B.L. (Bernie) Wright who succeeded Stan Fevre in 1944.

Wright had begun his career at Bundaberg Foundry, had engineering experience at sea, had served at Tully and was assistant chief engineer at Mulgrave when the Japanese invasion scare meant his wife and young family had to be evacuated South. To join them he went to Gin Gin. J.V. Hayden (later of North Eton) was manager. "They had a very short season that year", Wright recalls. "We were making munitions". He arrived at Farleigh a month before the end of the 1944 crushing. Substantial reconstruction had been carried out in the mill up to 1940 but by 1944 postwar upgrading was needed.

Wright was President of the Queensland Society of Sugar Cane Technologists in 1964. Quiet and gentlemanly, his imperturbability in a growth period which saw many emergencies, became legend. He performed wonders of improvisation minimising lost

time when stoppages occurred.

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George Shaw reported in April 1953: "Few larger jobs have ever been undertaken by a mill during the off season than was undertaken by your Association during 1952". The major items of plant were: No. 1, 7 ft. mill with first motion gearing; No. 2, 7 ft. mill with first and second motion gearing; No. 3, 7 ft. mill with engine and gearing complete; new effet vacuum pan; new effet condenser, No. 5 pan changed to oval coils. There was in addition a long list of lesser items and 100 new tramway trucks.

The new plant ensured the permanence of the clusive 10,000 with an average weekly rate of 10,955 and a best week of 12,109. It was to do much better than that. A new Walker's 7 ft. mill in 1954 replaced the Walker's 6 ft. unit installed in 1928 at No. 4 and with a vastly improved recovery section the new "big mill" in 1962 crushed 500,003 tons in 24.92 weeks. Long years of striving dating back virtually to 1883 lay behind. New difficulties were not far off but there were now following winds.

### Part fifty-one

### STRENGTH AND STABILITY

By 1954 difficulties with railway cane and with storage and removal of sugar were mounting. Relief was at hand but not without doubts and traumas which were to test the developing strength and stability of the Association.

Ernest Evans had been an A.S.P.A. executive member since 1945 and M.L.A. for the State seat of Mirani since 1947. In 1951 he became a member of the Bulk Handling Consultative Committee formed to consult with the Government on introduction of bulk sugar handling at Australian ports. In November 1951 a trial bulk cargo for England had been "bled" from bags into the ship *Artemesia*. The following year Mackay and Lucinda Point were named by State Cabinet as the first two ports to be equipped for bulk. Mackay's target date was 1957.

George Shaw became involved in 1949 in establishment of the A.S.P.A. sponsored and miller financed Sugar Research Ltd., which set up the Sugar Research Institute at Mackay. On the first board of directors he became deputy to the first chairman, C.A.N. Young of Fairymead.

In 1953 a young graduate with the B.S.E.S., C.B. (Cedric) Venton received the President's Medal of the Queensland Society of Sugar Cane Technologists after delivering a paper, "Notes on the Drying of Sugar". Venton was invited to Farleigh and he became chief chemist in 1954. Jim Pollard was switched to full time research.

A happy bond developed between Venton and B.L. Wright. Design of Farleigh's bulk equipment was completed in 1955. Venton was breaking new ground and a

formidable body of opinion doubted if his 400 ton capacity bulk bin would empty. He left Farleigh — in mutual goodwill — in 1956 and it fell to Venton's successor A.S. (Alex) Kilcullen to report on the result. The bin was loaded to 413 tons. The sugar "flowed freely irrespective of the amount held or how long it had been there".

Shaw's annual report on the 1957 season elaborated: "Farleigh equipment was thought out and basically designed by our own staff and was the first big 'bin' type of storage in the Queensland sugar industry. Although in some quarters there were doubts about its ability to do the job, it operated smoothly from the first day . . . . . . it is now the pattern for almost all the bulk installations in the industry".

It was a good year. Every crushing rate record was broken and 19,000 tons exceeded in two separate weeks; but a formidable problem involving North Coast rail supplies had developed. The railway system had become progressively less satisfactory as crop sizes and crushing rates increased. "Grass" canes made bulky loads and to help contain them, wooden stanchions were fitted to walled railway waggons in 1951. Flat top waggons were tried in 1952. Erratic delivery and failure to clear all cane on the day it was loaded, aggravated lost time and stale cane problems.

Average freight charges increased from 5/9d. a ton in 1950 to 12/6d. in 1956 and from 1st August 1956 jumped to 18/6d. The mill showed a small loss on 1956 railway cane. When all avenues of appeal for relief seemed exhausted, Shaw felt that if the Railways Commissioner knew that Farleigh might ask the Government to be allowed to provide its own transport the Department might consider a freight reduction to protect a large slice of its revenue.

Disenchantment with cane traffic however cut two ways. The Department was not anxious to preserve the freight. State Cabinet notified its refusal to reduce the rates in August 1956 and it was decided to call a meeting of growers to discuss a mill tramway. On 22nd October the mill decided to seek Government approval to go through Crown land. This permission was a long time coming and on 7th February 1957 an urgent approach was made to Premier V.C. Gair.

Meanwhile a track through the hills running from The Leap to the Mt. Jukes region and extending towards Seaforth was not easy to find. The Railway Department had long ago taken the best gap near The Leap and the northern tramway route surveyed in 1900 was too long.

Ken White and Alan Denman searched the area. Jack Tucker and Arthur Noonan worked it over and one of the directors "buzzed" the ranges in a Dragon Rapide of the locally owned Coastal Airways. Finally White and Denman checked their explorations with surveyor George Shield and established that "Attards Gap" now called "The Summit" on the finished tramway, was the best crossing point. A general meeting to discuss the proposal was called for Tuesday 23rd April 1957. A tentative 33 miles route to Pindi Pindi with alternatives was displayed; projected cost was £500,000.

The plan startled growers. For many years the level of the Mill Purchase Account in the annual financial statement had been taken as a barometer of mill progress. The debt stood at a record £609,000 at 31st December 1956. A tramline would cost almost this much again — if not more. Steady bonus share redemptions were being made. Cautious willingness to suspend these, developed but growers were adamant they would not pay a levy on cane to build the line.

The meeting was rowdy and proved to be a rare one in which Ernie Evans could not win majority support. A few growers clouded the issue by endeavouring to settle

fancied old scores with the "big fellow". Evans at times had shown himself as a tough leader who could come down hard on opponents but he also knew his growers. It was time for a strategic retreat. The minutes record: "The meeting was not conclusive and rather than risk a direct refusal the chairman moved that a secret ballot be held at the annual meeting on the next Saturday (27th April 1957)".

Evans believed the line could be built within Farleigh's means. It was a field he knew something about. Prior to his arrival at Mackay in 1928 he had played a leading role in construction of a cane line at Little Mulgrave. He had been Pioneer Shire chairman from 1934 to 1947 and now again since 1955. His council had only recently completed satisfactorily a section of new bitumen road near Farleigh after the original contractors had been unable to continue.

Grower acceptance was all important. Evans was disturbed by the setback. He frankly admitted to a close colleague that his pride was dented a little; but that was not the issue. "They don't understand how bad it could get", he said. "You can't just break even on 40 per cent of your crop. You'd be stone motherless broke. They have to be educated." This was a remark made in quiet low key conversation, not rhetoric at a general meeting. He genuinely feared the consequences of not building the line.

In the next four days an intense campaign of "education" began, as vigorous as the spirited canvassing of the thirties. Cane inspectors Jack Tucker and Arthur Noonan broke all precepts of staff impartiality and urged growers to support the line. Tucker's facility for getting cane to the mill was being tested in a new dimension. The result of the next Saturday's ballot was 205 for construction, 94 against with five informal. There was however an all important proviso. Growers still had to approve a scheme of finance.

The Mill Purchase Account over the years had been not greatly different to a farm overdraft account, but Central Bank controls and the increasing complexity of mill affairs finally made this agreeable procedure impracticable. Farmers were shareholders and were expected to provide some of the new capital. The board decided to issue 8 per cent debentures to the value of £100,000. Growers enthusiastically promised £55,000 in a tentative canvass; some of them had been and were still opposed to a levy.

The Gair Labor Government fell in 1957 and to join the Nicklin coalition cabinet Ernest Evans had to relinquish all directorships. He resigned on 15th August 1957 and K.J. White succeeded him.

Son of Thomas White of Coningsby, Ken White had grown up in the district, driven mill locos and had been a union representative. He had been a Farleigh Mill Suppliers' Committee member and chairman, Farleigh board member since 1948 and a Pioneer Shire Councillor since 1955. He also succeeded Ernie Evans as Pioneer Shire Chairman in 1957. He spent the balance of 1957 carefully nurturing grower opinion to support the tramline, acutely aware that in spite of the favourable vote at the 1957 annual meeting, unequivocal grower approval hinged on acceptance of a scheme of finance.

The board presented a scheme to a meeting on 25th January 1958. White had become a close colleague of Evans although he was cast in a somewhat gentler mould than his old friend; but when the meeting opened he was as tough on potential dissidents as Evans had ever been. The board's scheme was approved. Repayments to the bank were re-scheduled and a £100,000 debenture loan approved. (Growers, staff and selected investors exceeded the target.)

Surveyor George Shield worked on a line survey for most of 1958 and a short section

Hume Black of The Cedars; M.L.A. Mackay 1881-93; Min. for Lands 1888-90; special agent in London 1893. Photo: Mackay "Daily Mercury".



Ernest Evans, Chairman Farleigh 1936–57; M.L.A. 1947–65; main portfolios Mines and Main Roads 1957–65. Photo: Farleigh Mill.





Walter Trueman Paget of Nindaroo; M.L.A. 1901–15; Min. for Railways and Agriculture 1908–11; Railways 1911–15. Photo: Mackay "Daily Mercury".

of earthworks was advertised for tender. Had tenders, either received, or suggested but not lodged, applied to the whole line the cost would have been prohibitive. All tenders were rejected on 3rd February 1959 and the possibility again arose of the Association doing the earthworks itself.

The need did not arise. Jack Carter of Carter Brothers, who had done a big job on the Townsville-Mt. Is a railway and had done good work at Bundaberg, proposed to Shaw that if he had the whole job, economies of scale would reduce the cost. Carter was a flamboyant character. On 26th March, with a pilot, he flew to Mackay to meet Farleigh Board. He took off from Rockhampton and vanished into low cloud. It was a bleak day and Mackay airport people were becoming uneasy. He finally came in from the sea almost at wave-top level. His tender of £4,300 a mile was accepted.

On that day the original 33 miles to Pindi Pindi were extended to take the line three miles farther on to Wagoora. The earthworks quote was therefore £154,800 for the whole job. On that day also V.G. Crawford was appointed consulting engineer. The Wagoora extension finally cost more than £65,000 for earthworks and construction so that proportionally it was an expensive section.

W. "Dick" Richardson, general manager of South Johnstone mill, was engaged as a special consulant for formation work in the mangrove areas of Constant Creek. Earlier in his career Richardson had had experience of line work in similar conditions in Fiji.

Carter set up a mobile administration camp and tackled the job with D9 bulldozers and matching ancillary equipment — heavy gear in 1959. He held two effective public relations functions at Mackay — one in town and one on the job. Guests commented on the excellent prawns served each time. "I did a job for a trawling company", he explained. "They went broke and paid me in prawns."

The route required three major bridges — at Constant, Murray and St. Helens Creeks. Eddie Kerrigan was appointed bridge construction supervisor dating from 28th September 1959. At Attard's Gap (The Summit), Carter struck heavy going in a long deep cutting. Latter day 32 ton Baldwin locos still do not haul a full rake across this crest. To a motoring public used to observing obviously steep grades the sector is not spectacular. To the locomen the grades are steep. Just northwards of The Summit a massive rocky outcrop had to be skirted up hill. The result is the present overhead bridge across the Habana–The Leap road.

The completed system cost \$1,500,000. It began operating in 1961 with three 24 ton Clyde diesel locos working three eight hour shifts for five days a week and one 16 ton Com-eng loco working four hours daily, all controlled by two-way radio. In 1962 for a time it seemed breaking truck axles might isolate the North Coast. The problem was finally overcome with help from Sugar Research by fitting heavier axles of different steel. The line handled 111,580 tons in 1961 and a record 440,415 tonnes in 1977, substantially more than the total mill area crop of 342,699 tonnes in 1961, when the line opened.

Heavy rain in January and early February 1979 caused massive track and bridge damage. A large section of the 442 feet long St. Helens Creek bridge was washed away when the creek changed course. Consulting engineers Ullman and Nolan, contractor Hornibrooks and mill tramway and bridge gangs under George Biddle and Darby Hebbard had a large new concrete and steel structure ready by the end of May. Total cost of flood damage to the tramway system that year was \$300,000 which included



Canecutters about 1919; probably a crop of Uba. L. to R.: Stan Wright, Albert Wright, 'Wingie' Johnstone, William Wright, George Wright, Harry Wright. Photo: George Wright.

\$230,000 to rebuild and repair the damaged bridge. Manager Barry Sheedy in that year's reports paid special tribute to Hebbard for his "dedication and enthusiasm". Shortly afterwards Darby Hebbard was killed in a road accident.

The late 1940's saw numerous on-farm experiments with mechanical harvesters. The perseverance of would-be inventors was enormous. Some farm workshops were well equipped but some still centred on a small hand worked forge. Scraps of frames holding shear blades or friction driven coulters turned up in old implement piles for years afterwards.

The Dumbleton Harvesting Committee operated Farleigh's earliest mechanical harvesting group with a tractor mounted Rasmussen whole stick machine. For a pioneering machine it worked very well. Its friction driven cutting discs — coulters — allowed for a relatively inexpensive machine though its effectiveness would have been improved considerably had they been power driven. It had a good topping device. It lay sticks along the rows dropped as they were cut and this made for difficult loading. Subsequent whole stick machines turned the sticks at right angles to the rows and made loading easier.

The group operated from 1951 to 1957 and the Rasmussen cut up to 15,000 tons in a season. Originally there were 12 farms in the group and the machine cut on six farms each day. Extensive shifting from farm to farm caused heavy overloading on the tractor's extended axles. Operations were in charge of a management committee of three whose decision was final. In its later years the group used a Fairymead machine. This had a shear blade instead of coulters as a base cutter. The group, large by the



Loading behind the Rasmussen harvester. Sticks were dropped along the drills of cane instead of the traditional position which was at right angles to the drills. This made loading more difficult. Photo: Lex Sim.

Rasmussen whole stick harvester, 1951. Photo: Lex Sim.



standard of any period, provided a fine example of grower co-operation. Original members were: Percy Harvison, Lex Sim, Colin McGown, Dick Johnson, Stan Ray, Ted Dimond, Ray Bowman, George Wright, Arthur Brooks, Ned Ryan, Fred Holmes and Bernie Kirwan (Kirwan brothers).

Loaders were first used extensively in 1956 (67 units). In that year the mill set a Queensland single train weekly record of 18,132 tons. Loaders brought with them unprecedented extraneous matter problems. In 1961 mud forced the mill temporarily to stop crushing and hand loading in wet paddocks had to be ordered. Three Venton whole stick harvesters operated in 1960. Mackay district chopper harvester trials, begun in 1959, were extended to Farleigh in 1960.

In 1962 the crop exceeded 500,000 tons. After the last loco rake had been delivered a truck count indicated the magic half million might just not be there. Someone remembered a lone truck shunted aside about three weeks earlier for tests on cane deterioration. It was brought in. The grower credited with it must rank as one of the Association's stalest cane consignors — or perhaps it was added to the tally of unidentified trucks shown in the records as "in suspense".

Chief cane inspector Jack Tucker, the old master of maintaining cane supplies to the mill, had died that season from a heart attack which caught him while he was fighting a fire near the St. Helens Creek landing. He certainly would have approved. What effect that last truck had on the last shift's coefficient was certainly never incorporated into the earlier deterioration recordings. As it happened it wasn't needed. The half million was exceeded by three tons and no partly loaded truck left in the sun that long could possibly have weighed three tons.

The fifties saw poor world markets. Farleigh growers left 50,000 tons of cane in the fields in 1958 and in 1959 only 34.3 per cent of the area available for harvest was cut; 7,091 acres were left standing.

Farm peak tonnages had applied since 1939 but later to stimulate heavier crops, the peak basis was changed to one which provided for acceptance of as much cane as could be grown on a given area. If restrictions were to operate, areas were reduced. The incentive to increase tonnages per acre served the mill well but the "area peaks" led to substantial inequities in 1958–59 and peaks designated in tons of cane were reintroduced in 1960.

In 1962, the year of the broken axles emergency, George Shaw was sent by Sugar Research to an International Society of Sugar Cane Technologists' conference in Mauritius. That year a clear upturn in the traditionally cyclical world sugar market seemed to be emerging. Shaw went on to Europe, became certain that an industry expansion was imminent and ordered items of new plant, in particular a new B.M.A. fugal from Germany. Farleigh immediately planned a new boiler for 1964 and a fifth 7 ft. mill for 1965. While he was overseas Shaw learned of potential markets for Australian molasses, which made him a knowledgeable participant in industry plans that year to administer molasses production and finance its own molasses pool. In 1962 Farleigh made its first sugar (1,900 tons) for the Japanese market.

In October 1963 a Committee of Enquiry headed by Queensland Supreme Court Judge the Hon. H.T. Gibbs (later Sir Harry Gibbs) recommended a major industry expansion. Among "Gibbs Report" recommendations were that State mill peaks be increased to 2.43 million tons by 1970–71; 150,407 acres of new land be assigned and that about 42 per cent of new land in any district or mill area to go to new growers.







Top: A Calen lift 1950's. Photo: J.C. Dunn.

Middle: Tramway siding 1960's.

Bottom: First loco rake beneath Government railway underpass 1976. Photo: Doug. McLean.

Farleigh gained 31 new farms and the way was open, after nearly a century, for Seaforth lands to grow cane. The mill's peak increased by more than half — from 44,702 to 68,072 tonnes for 1964 and further to 79,248 in 1965. The immediate plant expansion based on Shaw's early forecast had been timely.

That year George Shaw decided to contest the Federal seat of Dawson for the Country Party following the retirement of Sir Charles Davidson. He finished at Farleigh on 8th February 1964, exactly 21 years after he arrived. An unwritten convention dating from the turbulent thirties that there should be no "heir apparents" to top jobs still holds good. It is therefore the more creditable that E.J. (Edgar) Cliffe was promoted from secretary to manager without the post being advertised. It is historically appropriate here to review Association top management posts to date (1982).

W. Christoe, the "old Company" secretary died in office late in 1934. A.P. Bowerman filled the post from 1934 to 1943 when he was succeeded by E.C. (Ted) Bow. Bow had joined the staff on 25th January 1935, chosen from a short list of 29 out of a total of 292 applicants. He left Farleigh in 1951 to become Marian manager and was succeeded by Edgar Cliffe. When Cliffe became manager in February 1964, J.W. (Jim) White followed him as secretary. He resigned in 1970 to join the Mackay firm of chartered accountants Douglas Gibb and Lewis. He was succeeded by B.B. (Barry) Sheedy, who followed Edgar Cliffe as manager in 1976. G.B. (Geoff) Allen was secretary in 1976-78 followed by the present (1983) secretary, G.R. (Gordon) Shaw, one of George Shaw's sons.

Shortly before the end of the 1964 crushing, Ken White died. He had had a busy seven years. He had been Pioneer Shire Council chairman and an executive member of the Queensland Local Government Association. He was a Harbour Board member (1955-64) and chairman of the Mackay Sugar Manufacturers' Association, a member of the Pioneer River Improvement Trust and of the Mackay District Abattoir Board.

Tom Mulherin then 70-years-old moved back to the job he had first assumed in 1926. The "Old Fox" as close colleagues sometimes referred to him for his unerring reading of sugar politics, and a relatively youthful manager, began settling in to a new partnership.

### Part fifty-two

# FULL CIRCLE

Tom Mulherin had been seriously ill when Ken White succeeded Ernie Evans as chairman of directors in 1957. People speculated on whether, otherwise, he would have been a contender for the top position. Mulherin had long ago proved himself an accomplished "numbers man" and he understood the danger to Association stability inherent in such speculation. He chose a time and place, knowing his remarks would be circulated, to observe, "Ken White is chairman and his board is behind him". Sparks occasionally flew between the two but they were cordial friends and Mulherin invariably nominated White for chairman after each annual meeting.

The Mulherin-Cliffe partnership began in heady days, during which were planted seeds of future difficulties. The "Gibbs expansion" meant the Australian sugar industry would rely on export markets to a greater extent than it had ever done.

In retrospect, the North Coast tramline emergency seemed to have developed at a fortuitously appropriate time, for the back of the construction debt was broken before heavy outlays were needed on new plant and the line was there in 1964 to give the mill full control over the transport of what was to be a vastly enlarged crop. With all his determination to get on with the line in 1956–57 Ernie Evans could not have known how fortuitous the timing of that transport emergency was to prove. Just before he died — suddenly in 1965 at the height of an outstanding Parliamentary career — he remarked, "We were right about it weren't we — more right than we knew".

In common with most other mills Farleigh re-wrote its crushing record book in 1965, but drought and frosts made cane hard to handle and treat. Problems of hand cutting and with end loaders, in short cane, stimulated grower interest in chopper harvesters. In addition, to stay ahead of international marketing competition, higher norms of quality were imposed by the Sugar Board, involving grain size, colour, starch content and higher filterability levels. These were the first tastes of toughening times.

By the end of 1966, euphoria generated by the 1964 expansion had evaporated. The world sugar price fell to its lowest post-World War II level during 1965, and for the 1966 season Mulherin reported: "Your Association produced more than 20 per cent above the mill peak of 78,000 tons of sugar, . . . . . close to 60 per cent of this mill's production will attract the unsatisfactory low world market price . . . . . most careful husbandry of prices has been necessary".

Mulherin's supplementary remarks to that report — given in April 1967 — seemed like a catalogue of woes but he used adversity to stimulate Association loyalty as he had done effectively 35 years before in much more stressful circumstances. The atmosphere of the 1967 annual meeting was one of security, if not wild optimism.

Comparison of financial statements for 1966 with those of past years and decades was reasonably simple, for massive inflation had not yet greatly distorted monetary face values. Farleigh's capital debt was then at its highest level ever. The total of the Mill Purchase Account, National Bank term loans, a loan from the State Government



Top L. to R.: T.G. Mulherin, K.J. White, R.I. Robinson (chairmen). Middle L. to R.: W.B. Fordyce (chairman), A. McKinnon, J. Smith (managers). Bottom L. to R.: W.F. Clarke, G.W. Shaw, E.J. Cliffe (managers). Pictured elsewhere: J. McGown, D. McGown, S. Axam, E. Evans.

Insurance Office and issued debenture bonds totalled \$2,211,300. Gross income from sugar for the financial year was only \$7,287,974. The bulk of the final phase of the expansion programme planned in 1963-64 was completed but in spite of the financial downturn, factory improvement was continued in 1967 and '68. Old philosophies were holding firm. In 1933 Ernest Evans had said "to stand still is to fall back". In 1957, queried on when the mill might reach an optimum size, George Shaw had said: "I can't see there will ever be a case to stop expanding".

The industry borrowed \$19m. from the Federal Government to supplement returns from the 1966 crop. (The final redemption payment of this loan was made in 1980.) To top a most unsatisfactory year in 1966, Mackay's rainfall of 35.38 inches was the smallest annual rainfall but two (1923 and 1926) since records were begun.

In the mid 1960's, Edgar Cliffe and secretary Jim White produced prodigies of tight and accurate costing. Nor had years dulled Mulherin's touch in negotiating with financial institutions. Of Cliffe's work in this period he later remarked: "Your hand is strengthened if you produce a set of figures the money people know you will stick to".

The mill set new throughput records in 1966 but engineer Bernie Wright and chief chemist Harold Dark (who had succeeded Alex Kilcullen in 1961) were facing mounting problems with extraneous matter from machine harvested cane. Farleigh had treated chopper harvesters more warily than had some other mills. Their use entailed extensive modification of transport arrangements and a lot of "catch up" work had been required on old tramways following the transport aberration of the North Coast extension.

Farleigh suppliers had rarely harvested in groups, which would become the standard pattern as machine harvesting developed. Siding accommodation for groups supplying chopped cane would have to be phased in, while individual whole stick suppliers still had their own points of delivery. Growers with various delivery points wishing to group harvest caused a problem to mill, other growers and contractors alike. The problems were aggravated by a sprawling and scattered mill area and traditional concepts of points of delivery had to be re-thought. The mill carrier had to provide for both types of cane and for a few years, after a break of several decades, growers again delivered cane straight from the farm to the carrier.

Five chopper machines in 1964 increased to 18 in 1965. In 1966, 31 chopper and six whole stick machines cut 40.5 per cent of the crop. Chief cane inspector John Potts (who had succeeded Jack Tucker in 1962) nicely summed up the extraneous matter problem: "While the chopper machines are labour saving . . . . . if not closely controlled they can be used rather more like vacuum cleaners than cane harvesters". With roughly half the crop chopped up and the rest mechanically loaded, the mill suffered extraneous matter problems with tops and trash from the former and — particularly when the ground was damp — dirt and stones from the latter.

Mulherin described world prices in 1967 as "depressed and uneconomic". Confidence was further depressed when the linch pin of the Australian export market, the British Commonwealth Sugar Agreement, was not extended for its customary further year (beyond 1974 in this case) and Britain had applied to join the European Economic Community.

Sugar recovery problems stemming from deterioration of chopped up cane began to assume significant proportions. The effect on mill work was only one factor. The problem was intensified by ever toughening quality requirements laid down by the



A front end loader at work in the late 1950's. Photo: Arnold Pratt.

Sugar Board. The whole sugar producing process was involved, from provision of sophisticated recovery plant to reviewing transport schedules and disciplining burning and harvesting practices on the farms. The Sugar Research Institute became, more than ever, an integral part of the production process.

During 1968 an International Sugar Agreement was signed and continuance of the British Commonwealth Sugar Agreement negotiated. Inevitably, in a period of world surplus, the former meant production restrictions. For a time it seemed that Queensland's output would be restricted to mill peaks plus 20 per cent. This would have cleared virtually all the cane from Queensland except large areas at Mackay. Mackay mills protested strongly to the Sugar Board and to the Government and on a subsequent reassessment of markets, the local crop was shifted.

In 1968, Tom Mulherin was awarded the O.B.E. in the Queen's Birthday Honours list for a long involvement in sugar industry, servicemen's and local authority affairs. He was accorded a congratulatory function at the Harbour Lights Restaurant at Mackay Harbour. Just outside is Mulherin Park, named in memory of his brother Jack, whose farm sale to Joe Trevaskis in 1925 had projected Tom into the Farleigh spotlight in the first place. Tom asked as a special guest his younger brother Joe, his partner of the take-over years, who had patiently stayed home and worked the farm while Tom attended to Farleigh affairs.

Sugar acquisition doubts of 1968 led to smaller farm plantings for the 1969 crop. A poor Queensland season meant all cane was harvested, and at firming prices, but this benefit was eroded at Farleigh by poorer sugar content. Cliffe however was able to



A Venton whole stick harvester in 1960. Photo: Arnold Pratt.

report new mill performance records and the highest milling efficiency in the history of the Association.

In 1970, International Sugar Agreement production disciplines resulted in Farleigh farmers leaving 113,000 tons of cane unharvested. Mulherin, Cliffe and their Board proposed to the Sugar Board and to the State Government that Farleigh would finance production, storage and associated costs of harvesting this total. The proposal was considered a breach of I.S.A. commitments but Mulherin maintained that the spirit of the I.S.A. disciplines would not be violated. He explained to his growers: "We believed the sugar might be wanted but even if it weren't, the decision to leave a crop of that size which had needed a lot of money to grow was just silly economics". Mulherin stressed he was not seeking concessions. Phased down production, ran his argument, was preferable to "sudden death" rejection of a standing crop. The risk rested with Farleigh if subsequent market surpluses meant later standover tonnages on Farleigh farms. In the event shortages not surpluses developed.

The rest of the industry and the Government chose to stick by the letter of the rules. No other mill, including those similarly affected, supported Farleigh, but by April 1971, prices were firming and world shortages were developing. These factors, Mulherin told that year's annual meeting of shareholders, "vindicated the actions of your directors in pressing for increased acquisition".

That was Tom Mulherin's last meeting. He went into hospital soon afterwards, was discharged for a short time, and then had to return. Sid Gordon drove him back — "walking wounded" he quipped. The old mechanism was slowing down and after his re-entry to hospital, old friends realised he knew it. He died on 1st June, a few days short of his 78th birthday.

### Part fifty-three

# ANOTHER BIG MILL

Two candidates contested the chairman's position — S.O. Gordon and A.J. Noonan. Both had been directors since 1960. The vote went to Gordon.

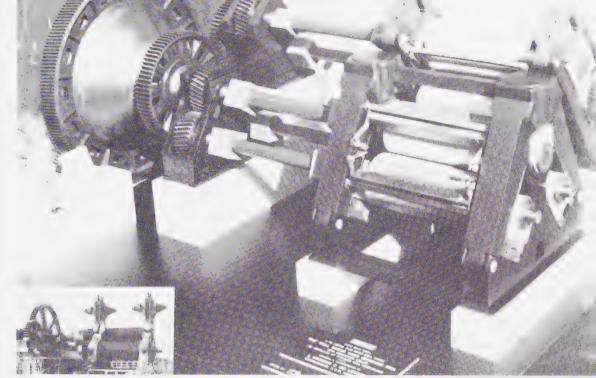
Arthur Noonan had been a Farleigh cane inspector under Jack Tucker. He had known both Mulherin and Evans well and from old growers had absorbed stories of the boisterous and formative years of the 1930's and '40's. He was a jackeroo in his early working years but youthful associations with grandsons of W.B. Fordyce — the sons of Andrew Fordyce of Marian — gave him an early "feel" for sugar industry affairs. He concluded, in his early years at Farleigh, that few more debilitating influences could operate against a co-operative than a power struggle within its — of necessity — limited membership. Commenting after the election he said: "I was beaten, I accept it and that's the end of it".

It hadn't been quite the end. Noonan approved the philosophy which had developed since the 1930's that there should be no heirs apparent to top posts. He did not favour appointment of a deputy chairman. In a sense he lost again, for his colleagues decided new industry circumstances warranted a deputy and voted him into the position. Gordon adopted the view that a deputy should have a practical role, not just hold a titular position and the two have been an effective team for 12 years.

Sid Gordon had spent his later childhood years at Calen in the 1930's, where his family's bakery business brought him into personal contact with settlers throughout the North Coast. In 1939 the family bought the farm of Bob McIntyre which was part of two square miles of old St. Helens lands, owned prior to cane settlement by Hubert McDermott. Gordon's family connections with Mackay district began with early Broadsound settlement and brothers Thomas, William and John Hatfield, the former of whom is earlier recorded as having purchased 6,000 bushells of Spiller's maize. Members of the next Hatfield generation, the family of William's son John, who was Sid Gordon's maternal grandfather, overlanded in 1910 from Charters Towers to settle on the old plantation lands of The Barrie near Eton.

Gordon's farm career began in an era when a high premium attached to a man's capacity for long hours of physical effort. He rated well as a canecutter when good men could cut and top by hand 20 tons in a day and hand load at least half of it; and he still managed to find the physical and intellectual energy for involvement in a variety of community activities. Since 1971 he has continued a tradition which during 100 years has kept Farleigh aspirations on the heights in spite of deep cyclical troughs. In the manner of Amhurst and Walker from the beginning, he has pursued a policy of planning "long" and thinking "big".

In Farleigh's tenth decade, dramatic technological improvement allowed the Australian industry to woo expanding markets with firm promises of reliable delivery but at a cost of increased vulnerability to world price vagaries and a quite dramatic ebb and flow of industry prosperity.



Farleigh's new 9 ft. (2.75 metres) mill — an early step towards the 21st century. The insert (lower left) is a photo, reduced to scale, of the first steel crushing unit used at Mackay — installed at The Alexandra in 1867. Each of its three rollers measured 4 ft. by 2 ft. in diameter and weighed 4 tons. Each of the five new rollers weighs 42 tonnes. The old Alexandra unit was shifted to Seaforth mill on the Burdekin where James McCready took this photo. The figure of a man at left is to scale. Photo: A. Goninan and Co.

Directors, executive staff and professional associates at the base of part of the new mill installation during construction. L. to R.: G.R. Shaw (secretary), S.O. Gordon (Chairman of Directors), H.W. Simpson, R.C. Denman, W.A. Pratt, S.B. Wright (solicitor), B.B. Sheedy (manager), C.A. Zahra, A.J. Noonan (Deputy Chairman), V. Aprile, R.W. Bennett (accountant).



Between 1962 and 1967 the mill's crushing rate increased from 157 to 238 tonnes an hour. The following five years, of generally depressed returns, saw a modest increase to 258 tonnes. The mill area crop stabilised comfortably above 600,000 tonnes enabling the mill's peak to be exceeded each year.

Installation of an A.T.V. subsider in October 1965 and 16,000 square feet of extra heating surface at the effets in 1966 had enabled best use to be made of the equipment installed for the 1964 expansion but as has been seen, it put heavy pressures on capital fund raising in 1965–66. Growers, staff and employees readily oversubscribed a new issue of debentures.

With the average crushing rate stable at around 250 tonnes an hour by the end of the 1960's, the Board decided to press on with improvements which would ensure maximum efficiency of existing plant and provide also an early lead to any future expansion — which past experience had shown could develop at short notice.

Former chief chemist C.B. Venton was commissioned to make recommendations. His projected plans, based on a crushing rate of around 300 tonnes an hour, seemed to allow a bold margin; a 700,000 tonnes crop, not yet achieved, could be processed in fewer than 20 weeks. With 113,000 tonnes left in the fields in 1970, chief engineer Colin Clarke could reasonably have expected this development plan to have been implemented at a more leisurely pace than others he had known.

In spite of relatively tough conditions of crop production and capital raising, major improvements were planned for 1973–74 and early funding provided for a major boiler installation by 1977. The mill began to take on a new look. The first turbine drive had



More spectacular than serious. One of Farleigh's Baldwin locos in a spot of bother. Photo: Jim Firth.

been installed in 1964, the year the fifth 7 ft. mill had gone in. By 1974 the five crushing units (all 7 ft.) were turbine driven, controlled from a central console equipped with a closed circuit T.V.

Meanwhile fickle world markets had taken a hand. Shortages had intensified in 1972 and producers failed to negotiate an International Agreement in 1973. Farm rotational practices were altered to provide a short term production boost for 1974 and Farleigh received very high prices for a very high proportion of its output from that crop. The industry enjoyed a brief boom of spectacular proportions.

A limited industry expansion of 300,000 tonnes of sugar gave the mill a peak of 108,600 tonnes in 1976. In 1977 cane production totalled 905,235 tonnes. The 300 tonnes an hour target rate, achieved in 1975, was raised to 400 and a large new boiler by 1977 became imperative. A million tonnes of cane seemed to be a practical target.

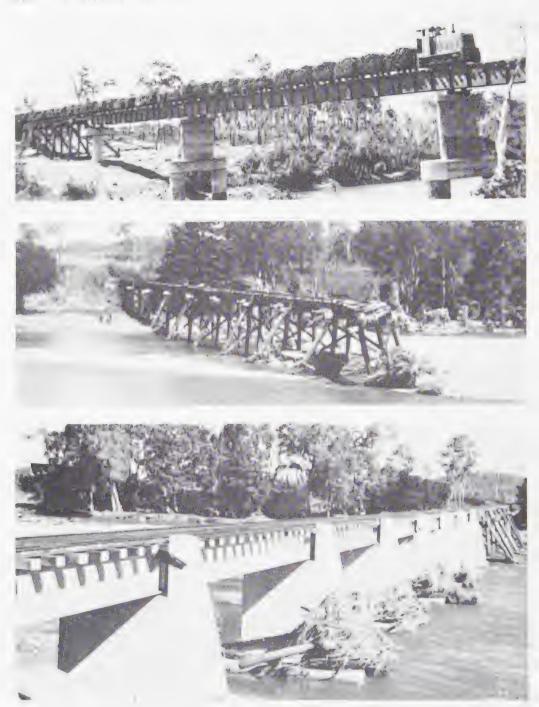
In 1977 the North Coast tramline handled 440,415 tonnes of cane. It had transported 111,580 tons in its first year in 1961. Extensive track upgrading was needed and in 1976 the first of the Association's three Baldwin locos arrived. The 32 tonner was then the largest in the industry. The loco fleet in 1982 comprised the three Baldwins (32 tonnes), five Clydes (24 tonnes) and four Com-engs (two 18 tonnes and two 16 tonnes). They handled more than 2,850 trucks with bins attached.

Satisfactory cane delivery relies on many people — George Biddle and his track maintenance staff, Mervyn Wright and his men at the loco workshops, locomen, cane inspectors, harvester contractors and farmers. The smoothness with which the operation usually runs belies the complexities involved, particularly in a scattered mill area. (See Appendix F.) By the mid 1970's reconciling needs of growers and contractors with those of the mill posed many problems which required hard decisions from E.J. Cliffe in the manager's office and precise planning by chief cane inspector A.E. Stevens.

Arnold Stevens' father F.H. (Frank) Stevens had been the first Farleigh cane inspector charged with co-ordinating North Coast cane supplies with mill intake in 1927. The task was rated difficult then; it has steadily increased in complexity. Harvesting planning must seek to maintain equity among growers in a situation which bristles with practical inequities; in widely separated districts, weather patterns often vary daily; grower grouping requirements vary greatly throughout the separate districts; varying distances from farms to sidings are in themselves basically inequitable. These are just three in a formidable list which has continued to throw up new problems almost annually since Farleigh's mill area first divided when the "old Company" acquired Homebush.

In funding the post-1973 expansion, new complexities in financial and industrial life became acutely prominent. Wages and salaries increased massively after 1973 and unprecedented currency inflation introduced new hazards to estimating the real cost of future capital works. Depreciation in the real value of exports caused by an appreciating Australian dollar was at first cushioned by the effects of high prices and increased crops. If this depreciation were not provided against, the effect of falling prices or poor growing years could be doubly serious.

In 1976 Edgar Cliffe resigned suddenly and without fuss. The Board with a minimum of delay and before speculation such a vacancy usually creates had time to develop, repeated the procedure of Cliffe's appointment in 1964 and offered the job to Barry Sheedy.



Top: Loco train crossing Murray Creek 1960's.

Middle: The remaining half of St. Helens Creek bridge after floods in January 1979. Photo:

Harold Smith.

Bottom: Concrete and steel replaced the destroyed section.

Sheedy had come to Farleigh from the Mackay District Canegrowers' Executive to succeed Jim White as secretary in 1970 when the stern economics of the mid sixties were still discernible and the mill was soon to make its unsuccessful attempt to avert standing over part of the 1970 crop.

Barry Sheedy's family has a record of notable involvement in local sugar industry affairs. His father, Bryan Sheedy, began a sugar industry career at Cattle Creek. After a year there he went to Marian in 1926 and remained for 45 years until his retirement in 1971. He was secretary for the last 17 of those years. Barry Sheedy's brother Myles is Marian manager (1982); another brother Terry is financial controller at Cattle Creek and a third, Peter, is full time secretary of the Plane Creek Mill Suppliers' Committee.

On his last day at Farleigh, Edgar Cliffe left his office after a characteristically full day's work. He could have reflected that in recent years, to implement mill policy, he had had to take hard decisions which had been, particularly in transport matters, less than popular among some of his growers. Whatever his thoughts he noted an unusually large collection of farmers in the mill grounds. A minute earlier he had closed the door on the need to wonder why, so he headed for home. So also did the farmers — but to his home not their own. He was accorded a warm farewell that evening at a function which, without his knowledge, had been in train for a week. He had been at the mill for 25 years, since the beginning of the period, from 1951, which most of Farleigh's latter day generation would tend to regard as the mill's "modern era".

Cliffe became chairman of Mackay Harbour Board in 1970 having first been appointed to the board as a Government nominee in 1968. From time to time since 1976, he has done special work both for Farleigh and other sections of the industry.

The Co-operative Association celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1976. More than 1,000 people gathered on the afternoon and evening of 14th May in and about a circus sized tent. At the annual meeting in April that year, Sid Gordon announced that for the first time in its history the Association was debt free. The balance sheet recorded no mill purchase account, no special accounts, no capital works loans or special loans and all debenture bonds had been redeemed.

It was a temporary state of affairs. Capital improvements then being budgeted for, totalled \$6.6m. The amount seemed large but in the next five years the price of consolidation and security was to be much greater. By the end of 1981, the total of capital expenditure for the years 1975 to 1981 was to amount to \$21,328,238.

During 1976, with a certain inevitability, world sugar stocks accumulated and prices began to fall. The Japanese insisted on re-negotiating an agreement they had signed in the boom period and which had been the main reason for the 1974 limited expansion. This circumstance prompted the average grower to wonder how much protection he had from a long term contract. By 1979, International Sugar Agreement production restraints were operating and Farleigh growers left 80,000 tonnes of cane unharvested.

Meanwhile the Board had begun a series of moves to preserve the mill area's productive lands. In 1973, the Central Sugar Cane Prices Board rezoned Racecourse's Silent Grove farms to Pleystowe. Farleigh appealed on the grounds of the advantages of co-operative mill ownership, past Association performance and guaranteed payment for cane; Silent Grove farms joined Farleigh.

By 1977 significant assigned areas were being lost to urban development. Not only was farm land being reduced but replacement areas would have to come from more

distant parts of the mill area, placing a greater load on the tramway system and increasing the cost of cane to the mill.

Farleigh became associated with Racecourse and Pleystowe in an approach to the Government which commissioned the civil engineering firm of Ullman and Nolan to conduct a study of Pioneer Shire lands within, in general terms, a 10 kilometre radius of Mackay. This led to a Government endorsed blueprint for protection of cane lands being formulated in 1978. In that year Farleigh also supported a Pioneer Shire Council policy plan incorporating the principles of the blueprint.

In an extension of its rural protection policy the Association purchased more than a square mile of land at Narpi in 1977 which was divided into 10, 20 hectare blocks, primarily for resale to growers who had lost land from Government resumptions. As a result of the transaction, Farleigh found itself the owner of a mob of cattle. It was a period of depression in the cattle industry and an old friendship between Tom Mulherin and E.A. "Ted" Walker of Thomas Borthwick and Sons (Aust.) Ltd., who many years earlier had worked at Farleigh, enabled the mob to be disposed of at the best prices Farleigh could have hoped for, given the existing state of the market. From the Narpi transaction Farleigh has acquired an historic stock brand 3PW, first used by old settler Patrick Wyse; 3PW and Dyson Lacy's 5DL became among North Coast cattlemen, the best remembered of early North Coast brands.

In 1980-81 the Association secured 31 blocks of subdivided Crown land in the Seaforth area, which were distributed among growers by ballot. In 1980, five farmers from the southern section of Proserpine district, with the tacit consent of all parties involved, were rezoned to Farleigh.

After 1979 the world sugar market settled to a long trough of depressed prices and surplus stocks, aggravated by European Economic Community farm subsidy policies and rendered more uncertain to Australian producers by restricted sales due to U.S.A. quota policies. The effect of European domestic policies on Farleigh's welfare in the 1980's is not greatly different to that which was exerted on Sir John Lawes' plantations on the North Side in the 1880's. At home, the determination of the Western Australian Government to grow sugar at the Ord River added an unprecedented complication to the Australian policy of tightly monitoring production expansion.

Against sobering indications of tightening circumstances Gordon, Noonan and Sheedy in 1979, with chief engineer Colin Clarke and chief chemist Bill Gampe, searchingly assessed the mill's performance. By contemporary standards it rated well — well enough probably to ride out toughening times. In spite of this, the Board made a decision which would at once consolidate what they had and provide a long stride into the future.

Sheedy had concluded that the performance of the rest of the plant could be improved by better results at No. 1 mill. An additional reason for strengthening No. 1 lay in a long term uptrend in the fibre content of the mill area crop. Furthermore Sheedy felt, from discussions with the industry's plant breeders that it would be prudent to assume that fibre content of new canes likely to suit Farleigh lands would tend to increase rather than decline. An 8 ft. mill seemed to be indicated. Sugar Research Institute was asked to examine and evaluate proposals the Board and management were considering.

Subsequent costing revealed that for capital expenditure on such a scale, best benefit would come from a 9 ft. (2.75 metres) installation. An order was therefore placed with



Standing against early foundation work of the new "Big Mill". L to R: Barry Sheedy (Manager), Bernie Wright (Chief Engineer 1944-68), Colin Clarke (Chief Engineer 1968 to date), Gordon Shaw (Secretary).

A. Goninan and Co. of Newcastle. All five existing 7 ft. mills would be retained. The unit was originally planned to be ready for the 1982 season but acute industrial disruption in sugar mills in 1981 caused postponement.

The mill, rated by the supplying company as the largest in the world, has five rollers each weighing 42 tonnes with a capacity to crush 16,000 tonnes of cane a day, i.e. 666 tonnes an hour. Total weight is 600 tonnes. Power comes from two steam turbines of 1,100 horse power each. The five rollers are driven by massive tail bars, one to each roller. A 9 ft. (2.75 metres) wide shredder, to be installed with the new mill, was also rated by the suppliers as the largest in the world.

It is unlikely that the full potential of the new plant will be developed for many years. What that potential is can only be guessed at but a glance backwards gives an indication. The 5 ft. 6 ins. and 6 ft. mills of Farleigh and Ashburton were planned, in 1883–84, to crush 25 tons an hour. They lasted up to 50 years and by that time were crushing 50 tons an hour.

The new unit provides an option for diffusion should water supplies or some new advance in technology make it feasible. All conceivable future expansion is being provided for immediately by clearing existing buildings and installations from around the site.

This would be the first time in Farleigh's history that major capital outlay has been planned without expectation of, or a pressing need for, immediate financial return. One of the lessons of the Farleigh Estate Sugar Company Ltd. liquidation was that it became too heavy a financial burden for a limited number of shareholders to provide

the capital needed to continue. In the dawning of a new economic age it is not inconceivable that without prudent and farsighted planning, the same plight could overcome Farleigh's 270 Association members. The Association is exploiting a practical option to guarantee long term survival.

When the three 7 ft. McNeil mills were ordered for 1952, an old timer remarked: "Farleigh never did things by halves. They even went broke twice on a grand scale". It was an over simplification and it is perhaps a sober note on which to conclude but it points up an element which has emerged from the background of this story as a recurrent theme. Farleigh's present security has been won by people who diversely have contributed more to its various aspects than most of them ever took out, or expected to take out, in terms of immediate material gain. Their imaginations were caught by the drama of an enterprise and they strove to make it work, whether it was Sir John Lawes with his vision of a tropical research station or Philip Kirwan fighting for a "fair price" for cane; Dick Hughes, a tradesman, whom B.L. Wright has said could raise metal turning to an art form, or Darby Hebberd striving to finish a bridge on time.

There is no provision in Farleigh's articles for beneficial share placements and the single vote of the smallest cane supplier carries equal weight with the single vote of the largest.

Frequently among themselves Farleigh people have pulled in diverse directions and it has taken wisdom and patience to combine profitably their disparate aims; but the honourable triers and most of the practical achievers strove for principle as vigorously as they strove for profit. If there is a lesson to be drawn from this record of 118 years it must surely lie in that fact.

# Appendix A

Farleigh suppliers 1912–1916. Asian and Melanesian names are repeated as they appeared and were spelled in the Farleigh Estate Sugar Co. Ltd. cane accounts.

Andrew, C. Arisola Alleyn, B. Arnell, H.A. Annenphane Alexander, E. Andrew and Wellby Avenell, H.A. Barry, A.J. Brooks, K.S. Brooks, A.A. Brothwell, J.T. Belong, P. Blackburn, J.M. Birditt, B. Bic, G. and Co. Boese, R. Boese, J. Bailey, D. Bluck, H. Bartrop, A. Blanchfeld, J.	Creese, H.C. Clark, F.L. Christie and Son Clayton, A. Cowdery, H. Caird, H.C. Calisee  Dimond, G. Donnelly, A.P. Donnelly, J. Denman, C. Denman, A.C. Denman, W.R. and Co. Donohue, M. Delahunty, J. Dinnie, R.D. Daniel, T.W. Devine, J. Dunworth, P. Daking, L.W. Desbois, L.	Fordyce, W.B. Franklin, J.W. Franklin and Bird Furlong, A. Flood, M. Farley, G. Ford, T. Farquhar, G. Fenoglia, P. Fatnowna, H.  Gentle, F. Gowseeka Geisler, J.E. Green, J. Gennra, V. Garner, F.J. Golam Mahoud Gennex, V. Gladstone, D. Grendon, W. Gaylard, T.
Colby, A.H. Christensen, C.P. Croker, J. Cameron, D. Chikagawa Colman and Wilkinson Cairns, C.H. Coakley, B. Coakley, W. Carswell, A. Cross, T. Cook, A.A.	Edwards, J. and J.A. Enright, J. Elfsborg, R. Elworthy, F. Eglington, H.H. Elliott, A. Ellul, M. Ellis, R.J. Eyre Bros.  Fletcher, G.A. Firth, P.	Holt, F.J.E. Hansen, O.V. Huntley, C. Humphrey, K. Hancock, J.A. Hamilton and Smith Holmes, A. Higginson, H. Hannaford, J.R. Honeywell, G. Hawkins, H.E. Hawkins and Herd

Logamier

Osborne, S.R. Lennon, J. Henderson, J.M. Lamb, J.H. Ohaneer Henderson, W. O'Riordan, J.T. Holmes, F. O'Donohue, M. Higgins, J. Manaway, J. Okemai Hennessev Bros. Manuel, F. O'Loughlin, P. Hicks, H. Manaway, G. Manuel, R. Okada Hand, J. Mana Dear Hodge, C.A. Mulherin, J.P. Pioneer Farm Syndicate Hill, L. Martin, F. Penny, J.C. Hancock, J. Polson, J. Molibach Huntley, C. Manish Chilar Powell, T.A. Hobler, W.B. Powell, H.C. Herwin, J. Michael, G.W. Powell, E. Major, G. Hobart, C. Pitt, S.J. Harward, T. Maletrow Mayae, F. Perry, R.L. Heath (G. or M.) Murry Bros. Palmer, C.H. Malcomson, M. Portelli and Bugeja Inda, Andrew Portelli, M. May Bros. Merrow, J. Penola, C. Jarvis and McHutcheon Mulherin, J.M. Pulis, C. Jensen, O.P.W. Milnes, J.W. Pilis. Jamieson, J.H. Mahady, J.J. Jane, J.L. Rarroo McCulloch, J. Jorgensen, P.C. Ruru Tanna McKinley, P. Rub Chin McAdam, T. Koch, W. Rush and McColl McGill, J. Kato Richards, F. McKenzie, E. Kirwan, P. Rankin, W.F. McCulloch, W. Kippen, R. Ready, J.J. McColl, R.S. Kemata, Kato and Wekaisa McDonald, J. Kolter, Jacob Sexton, M.J. Myora, G. Kandy Shinn, G. Munro, E. Kolker (or Kolfir), J. Shinn, W. Murry, H.L. Kinnon, R. Single Bros. Muller, E.E. Kahl, G.F. Simpson, A. Mitchell, J. Keioskie, J. Skeels, W. Maplethorpe, J. Sippie, J. Larcher, A. Silva, T. Logamier and Fatnowna Norris, J.R. de Silva, T.

Natoka

Schaper, H.

Suzuki Turner, L.E. Sanni, Kahn Turner, E. Symons, C. Turner, R.H. Sam, M.A. Tanaka Stephens, H.M. Thornton, J.R. Strachan, J. Thomsen, J.C. Sinai, F. Thompson, J.A. Stanford, A.A.

Tonelson (Trielson), P. Toloa

Schrank, C.

Shannon, C.K.

Shaw, C.H. Wvatt, M. Woodward, J.H.

Tewkesbury, G.W. Windsor, H.

Windsor, G. Walker, A. Wekaisa Williams, F.

Wilkinson, M.A.

Wicks, N.

Waddington, W. Wilkinson, J. Wallaloo

# Appendix B

Individual ledger entries of Melanesian and Asian workmen and farmers 1912-1916.

#### Melanesian

Alleyn, Bob, 1912-1916, Glendaragh, farmer.

Annenphine, 1912–1916, Pioneer, farmer.

Arisola, 1915, Pioneer, farmer.

Bic, Geo., 1915, Farleigh, farmer.

Bobongie, Andrew, 1912, The Ridges, farmer.

Buzza and Co., canecutters.

Bolong, Peter, 1912, Mt. Oscar, farmer.

Calissee and Co., 1912, Pioneer, farmers.

Calisee and Goweeka, woodcutters.

Feugardi 1912, The Ridges, farmer.

Goweeka (or Gowieeka), 1912, Pioneer, farmer.

Gow, Jimmy, 1912, contractor.

Inda, Andrew, 1912, Farleigh, farmer.

Paul, Jimmy and Joe, woodcutters.

Duke, firewood contractor.

Logamier and Fatnowna, 1912, Pioneer, farmers.

Lacker, W., 1912, woodcutter.

Myno (Myuo), contractor.

Mark, 1912, contractor.

Toloa and Co., 1912, Farleigh, farmers.

#### Asian

Ah Shew, 1912, Chinese, The Leap, farmer.

Golam Mahoud, 1912, Indian, The Ridges, farmer.

Golam Resul, 1912, Indian, Farleigh, farmer.

Dooley Khan, 1912, Indian, carpenter.

Munsa Sing, 1912, Indian, Pioneer, farmer.

Munsa Dear, 1912, Indian, The Ridges, farmer.

Akamine, 1912, Japanese, woodcutter.

Wekawa, 1912, Japanese, Bornsen's Scrub, farmer.

Chikagawa, 1912, Japanese, Bornsens Scrub, farmer.

Hiroka, 1912, Japanese, woodcutter.

Komata, 1912, Japanese, contractor.

Kajioka, 1912, Japanese, contractor.

Meda, 1912, Japanese, woodcutter.

Ochiai, 1912, Japanese, woodcutter.

Owti, 1912, Japanese, woodcutter.

Okamura, 1912, Japanese, woodcutter.

Tackurra, 1912, Japanese, woodcutter.

Wakimoto, 1912, Japanese, woodcutter.

# Appendix C

The A and B payment schemes at Homebush were:

A. Growers' deliveries were individually analysed according to a table of values worked out for the scheme. One shilling a ton was deducted for burnt cane. Cane quality was ascertained by collecting a sample of first roller juice for a period of not less than three minutes, each sample to represent 30 tons of cane. It was analysed in the company laboratory according to the ordinary methods of the company.

B. On delivery, eleven shillings a ton for cane was paid with a burnt cane deduction of one shilling.

At the end of the season, if less than ten tons of cane had been used to make one ton of sugar, the gross value of the whole crop crushed would be determined according to a table of values worked out for this scheme. After deducting gross payments already made under both A and B schemes, the balance would be divided among the suppliers under the B scheme pro rata to the tonnage delivered by them.

**Author's note:** The schemes were eminently fair and the scales of value for each scheme were very fair. Objections were largely "political", based on the fact that growers had little say in the fixing of values.

# Appendix D

St. Helens district properties listed in the "Sugar Fields of Mackay" in 1894 were:

M. and E. Murray, 1280 acres. Substantial buildings and yards, fruit, small crops, piggery, fowl house, dairy and beef cattle, horses. Communication with Mackay by boat which could go nine miles up Blackrock Creek.

M. and E. Murray, "The Warrior", 1,280 acres under the hills five miles from St. Helens.

P.A. Raymond, "The Plains", 800 acres. Substantial two-storey homestead and farm buildings. Occupied since 1886.

James Pollock's "Marguerite" of 1,280 acres had a slab house with slab floored kitchen, outbuildings, yards and fruit garden but had not been occupied for several years. Pollock was at one time manager of Bloomsbury.

# Appendix E

Doubts have always existed on the years in which Nindaroo, Farleigh and Habana closed. They closed in that order, one each in 1900, 1901 and 1902. This is substantiated by the following figures published each January in the Mackay Press for the tonnages crushed in the previous year. Figures for 1900 appeared in the *Daily Mercury* of 8–1–1901, for 1901 on 4–1–1902 and for 1902 sometime early in 1903 — this date having been obscured by fire damage to the issues examined.

The district production for 1900 is given as 21,450 tons which includes the total of the 12 Mackay mills and Proserpine (1,650 tons).

		Tons of Sugar made		
Year	1900	1901	1902	
Farleigh	1,000	950	Not listed	
Habana	1,000	2,400	1,000	
Homebush	4,300	5,500	4,000	
Marian	2,250	Obscured	1,700	
Meadowlands	550	250	450	
Nindaroo	800	Not listed	Not listed	
North Eton	1,700	1,500	1,250	
Palms	1,650	2,500	2,050	
Palmyra	400	500	450	
Plane Creek	2,350	2,700	2,200	
Pleystowe	1,800	2,200	2,050	
Racecourse	2,000	2,600	1,600	

Note: An element of doubt surrounds the 1902 figures for Palms and Pleystowe (2,050

in each case). The figure is consistent with relative sizes of output from both mills and with general production trends. The above figures tally with records held for many years by the Mackay Chamber of Commerce and were probably compiled from the same source. Individual mill figures given here are not quite the same as some given in business records of some of the mills.

# Appendix F

## Farleigh tramlines 1983

Main lines outside mill yard: North Coast 62.69 km plus sidings crossings loops etc., 18.89 km. (Total 81.58 km). Farleigh area 46.67 km plus sidings crossing loops etc., 12.77 km (Total 59.24 km).

Fotal outside mill yards 140.82 km.

Lines within mill yards: 610 mm (2 ft.) gauge 9.91 km. 1,070 mm (3 ft. 6 ins.) gauge 0.55 km. (Total 10.46 km.)

Grand totals: 610 mm (2 ft.) gauge track, 150.73 km. 1,070 mm (3 ft. 6 ins.) gauge track 0.55 km.

## **Directors Since 1926**

#### Chairmen

T.G. Mulherin 1926–1934 and 1964–1971 (Director 1936–1964)

R.I. Robinson 1934–1935 (Director 1927–1934, 1935–1936, 1939–1955)

W.B. Fordyce 1935–1936 (Director 1926–1935)
E. Evans 1936–1957 (Director 1929–1936)
K.J. White 1957–1964 (Director 1948–1957)
S.O. Gordon 1971–To Date (Director 1960–1971)

## Deputy Chairman

A.J. Noonan 1971–To Date (Director 1960–1971)

#### **Directors**

J.J. Hand 1926–1955
J.B. Kelly 1926–1927
J.R. Waters 1926–1927
C.W. Butt 1926–1927
J. Rae 1926–1927
F.H. Stevens 1926–1927
W. Pratt 1927–1928

G. Winton 1927–1936 and 1945–1948

W.R. Denman 1929-1930 N. Manning 1931-1936 G. Farquhar (Snr.) 1934-1949 P. Kirwan 1936-1945 F.J.E. Holt 1936-1944 P.J. McDermott 1936-1939 J.H. Maplethorpe 1944-1953 G. Farquhar (Jnr.) 1949-1970 H.W. Pilchowski 1953-1958 A.C. Denman 1955-1970 K.W. Manning 1955-1960 C. Cassar 1957-1960

F.P. Deguara 1965-1968 and 1970-1982

1958-1980

J.E. Kilcullen 1968–1973 L.G. Powell 1970–1979 C.A. Zahra 1971–To Date V. Aprile 1973–To Date

J.W. Hicks

W.A. Pratt 1979–To Date R.C. Denman 1981–To Date H.W. Simpson 1982–To Date

# Staff and employees of the Farleigh Co-operative Sugar Milling Association Ltd.:

## Manager

- A. McKinnon 1926-1929
- J. Smith 1930-1940
- W. Clarke 1941-1942
- G.W. Shaw 1943-1964
- E.J. Cliffe 1964-1976
- B.B. Sheedy 1976-to date

#### **Executive Officer**

D.L.W. Muir 1979-1982

### Secretary

- W. Christoe 1926-1934 (Company secretary since 1901).
- A.P. Bowerman 1934-1943
- E.C. Bow 1943-1951
- E.J. Cliffe 1951-1964
- J.W. White 1964-1970
- B.B. Sheedy 1970-1976
- G.B. Allen 1976-1979
- G.R. Shaw 1979-to date

#### Chief Engineer

- J. Evans 1926-1929
- A.G. Hall 1930-1934
- S.V. Fevre 1934-1944
- B.L. Wright 1944-1968
- C.D. Clarke 1968-to date

#### **Chief Chemist**

- J.D. Kinnon 1926-1929
- J.N. McKenzie 1929-1930
- D.L. McBryde 1930-1934
- J.S. Pollard 1934-1954
- C.B. Venton 1954-1956

A.S. Kilcullen 1956-1961

H.R.E. Dark 1961-1975

W. Gampe 1976-to date

## Chief Cane Inspector

A. Searle 1926-1927

F.H. Stevens 1927-1930

E. Freeman 1930-1947

L.J. Tucker 1947-1962

J.G. Potts 1962-1971

A.E. Stevens 1971-to date

#### Chief Electrician

K.J. French 1936-1942

A.E. Coyle 1942-1949

J.P. Sunner 1949-1960

W.E. Handley 1960-1969

R.W. Feeney 1969-to date

#### Overseer

D. Watt 1926-1950

E.J.A. Crabtree 1950-1957

C.R. Boxall 1957-1965

G.W. Biddle 1965-1982.

D.W. Jeffries 1982-to date

#### **Professional Associates**

Bankers: The National Bank of Australasia Ltd. has been the Co-operative Association's bankers since 1927.

Solicitors: Messrs. S.B Wright & Wright and Condie. The firm's centenary year at Mackay (1983) corresponds with that of Farleigh Mill.

Auditors: R.W. Bennett & Co. since 1979. Prior to that G.E. Jones & Co. were auditors, since 1926, having also been engaged by The Farleigh Estate Sugar Co. Ltd.

The following employees and staff members have been with the Association for 20 years or more from 31st July 1962:

Andrew R.J., Attard V.P., Batcheler L.J., Bertling A., Biggs R.H., Blunden W.H., Cahill K.A., Camilleri J.C., Carvolth G.C., Clarke C.D., Coogan T.J., Crace M.J., Cunningham D.M., Davies P.J., Davis W.F., Dempsey P., Edwards R.G., Falvey R.J., Farrow D.K., Feeney G.E., Feeney R.W., Firth R.J., Harvison L.T., Howard J.G., Jorgensen C.P., Kurtz C., McNichol J.D., Maher D.J., Pardoe E.J., Pearson J.D., Rae J.B., Saliba J., Smith H.W., Stuart A., Swanton W.G., Ware G.N., Wright M.J.

Records of Farleigh proprietory companies' executive staff are rare. Some senior men were:

## Managers

Robt. Walker, (Foulden-Farleigh) 1872-85.

Frederick Bolton, (for Sir J.B. Lawes) 1885-1901.

Jas. McGown, (Farleigh Estate Sugar Company Ltd.) 1902-04 and 1908-18.

J.C. Penny, 1904-08.

D. McGown, 1918-24.

S.J. Axam, 1924-26.

## Some senior officers:

H. Ling Roth, (late 1870's to mid-1880's) acted as agent for F.T. Amhurst and Sir J.B. Lawes.

Horace Spencer Jones, secretary, 1888-1894 (approximately).

T.W. Peele, secretary mid and later 1890's.

W. Christoe, 1901-26 (Farleigh Estate Co.) and 1926-34 (Farleigh Co-op. Assn.).

Geo. Wolfe, constructing engineer 1883.

P. Dunworth, South Sea Islanders' overseer, 1884-98.

Robt. Clarke, plantation overseer, 1903-1912.

Alex Barrie, engineer, circa 1910 and 1924-26.

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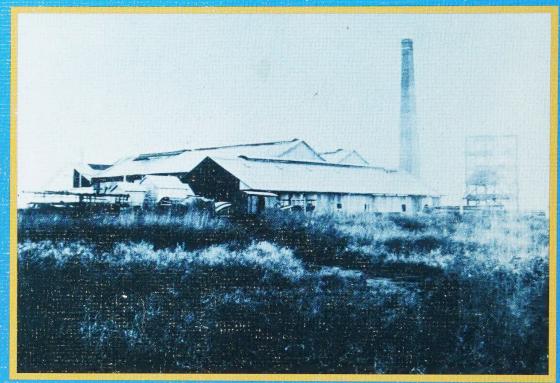
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Farleigh Mill, as it appeared in 1895. (Photograph courtesy of John Oxley Library.)

The Fameligh Co-operative Sugar Milling Association Ltd., is comprised of a group of cane growers in the Mackay district in Queensland, who own and supply cane to the Faileigh sugar mill.

Their farm lands were first settled in 1865 and the mill was built in 1863. Their present successful enterprise has developed from what can be seen to have been, in retrospect, a harshly selective evolutionary process, involving changing ownership patterns and innevative financial structuring, which moulded the Queensland sugar industry in a century of social, political and industrial change.

It was a process complicated by the everpresent interaction of market forces and reasonal fluctuations — good years and bad, with their successions of droughts, cyclones and floods, which lend darker shades to the generally bright picture of the successful settlement of tropical Queensland.

This story ranges from mansions and offices of privilege and power in nineteenth century England, to humble earth floor dwellings of pioneering yeomen farmers in early twentieth century Queensland; from corridors of Westminster to from and weatherboard offices of colonial municipal councils and sugar fortunists.

In the district which was to become the Farleigh community, all the 16 major sugar enterprises, on which canegrowing settlers depended for survival, ceased operations. In 1926 the farmers took the last remaining mill — Farleigh — into their own hands and formed the nation's first fully co-operative venture into sugar milling.

The principle was established, that "bona fide" cane suppliers become entitled to a share in the miff they supply, and that all co-operative mill shareholders must be "bona fide" cane suppliers.

In the latter sections of the book the author takes the reader into the board room of an Association of farmer — manufacturers who, since 1926, have mobilised formidable professional expertise and financial strength, to develop and sustain an enduring rural industrial enterprise.